BS
3629
.C8E9

Ewing

The University of Chicago
Libraries

A

LECTURE

ON PART OF THE

XVTH. CHAPTER OF THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THE ANDERSONIAN
CHICAGO LIBRARIES

A

LECTURE

ON PART OF THE

XV^TH. CHAPTER OF THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY

GREVILLE EWING,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, GLASGOW.

GLASGOW,

PRINTED BY W. LANG.

SOLD BY J. & A. DUNCAN, AND M. OGLE, GLASGOW; GUTHRIE & TAIT, AND OGLE & AIKMAN, EDINBURGH; E. LESLIE, DUNDEE; T. WILLIAMS, STATIONERS COURT, AND R. OGLE, GREAT TURNSTILE, HOLBORN, LONDON.

1804.

THE LIBRARY OF CHICAGO LUTHERAN
BS3629
C8E9

838800

A

LECTURE, &c.

ACTS XV. 1—21.

1 *AND certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren,* and said, *Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

2 *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.*

3 *And, being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice, and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.*

4 *And, when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and* of *the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.*

5 *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command* them *to keep the law of Moses.*

6 *And the apostles and elders came together, for to consider of this matter.*

7 *And, when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men* and *brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.*

8 *And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as* he did *unto us:*

9 *And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

10 *Now, therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*

11 *But we believe that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they.*

12 *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*

13 *And, after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men* and *brethren, hearken unto me.*

14 *Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*

15 *And to this agree the words of the prophet; as it is written,*

16 *After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down: and I will*

I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up ;

17 *That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.*

18 *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

19 *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God :*

20 *But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and* from *fornication, and* from *things strangled, and* from *blood.*

21 *For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.*

TO those who consider the difficulty of uniting men of various habits in any thing, especially in religious faith and practice; the early union of disciples of all nations in the church of Christ, will appear a striking argument of his divine power. In no case was this power more remarkably displayed, than in the abolition of the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. Their separation, originally of divine appointment, had been guarded by every interest, confirmed by long continuance, and perverted by all the antipathies of pride, into a continual motive for mu-

tual injuries. The union of persons, so peculiarly situated, could hardly be completed without disputes. The celebrated passage before us, contains an account of one of these; of an important decision concerning it; and of the happy effect with which that decision was attended.

The place, where this dispute originated, was the city of Antioch, the metropolis of Syria, which was reckoned the third city for greatness, in all the Roman empire. Thither the gospel had been early carried. There it was publicly preached to the Gentiles with the greatest success*. There, was formed the first church, consisting chiefly of Gentile converts, but, in the true spirit of the gospel dispensation, admitting believers in Christ, of whatever nation, without respect of persons. To obliterate the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, the disciples, perhaps by divine direction, were there first called Christians†. Out of the church in that city, the Holy Spirit called for the services of Paul and Barnabas in an extensive journey through countries where Christ had not yet been named; thence they were recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled; and it seems to have been the custom of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, to commence his apostolic journies from that city, and to return to his brethren

* Acts xi. 19. 20. † v. 26.

thren there for some time, at the conclusion of each of them *.

It was after the return of Paul and Barnabas from the first of these, that " certain men, which " came down from Judea, taught the brethren, " and *said*, except ye be circumcised, after the " manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

The " men," here spoken of, were probably like those mentioned in the 5th verse, of the sect of the Pharisees. They believed that Jesus was the Christ, but did not understand, or were not willing to admit the full import of that truth. They did not believe, that the Christ was to make a new covenant with his people, in consequence of which the first covenant should be made old, and be now ready to vanish away.

These men " came down from Judea," and probably assumed a tone of authority on that account. Pretending equal fidelity with the former preachers, who had all come from the same quarter, they " taught the brethren," and no doubt hoped, that their doctrine would be received.

What they taught was, the necessity of being " circumcised after the manner of Moses." This phrase is understood, in verses 5th, 10th, 24th, as implying the imposition of the whole Mosaic law. Circumcision was originally a patriarchal institution, and was afterwards connected with the covenant at Sinai; but it was not intended to continue under

* Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3. & xiv. 26. & xv. 36. & xviii. 22.

under the gospel dispensation, for in Christ Jesus "there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision," Col. iii. 11. "We are the circumcision, "who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in "Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the "flesh," Phil. iii. 3. "Ye are complete in him, "who is the head of all principality and power. "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off "the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, "wherein also you are risen with *him*, through "the faith of the operation of God, who hath "raised him from the dead," Col. ii. 10. 12. To insist, then, that the brethren should be circumcised, was nothing less than tempting them to withdraw their confidence in the merits of Christ. It perverted the law to a purpose which it was never intended to serve; it led to false views of the way of acceptance with God; and would have proved a complete check to the progress of the gospel. Hence the strong language used by Paul, against complying with this demand, in the epistle to the Galatians, chap. v. 2, 3, 4. "Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For "I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. "Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are "fallen from grace."

So

So opposite to this doctrine was that of those men who had now come down from Judea, that they said, "Except ye be circumcised, after "the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." This does not appear to have been a universal maxim amongst the Jewish people*. It

* When Izates, king of Adiabene, thinking he could not be thoroughly a Jew, unless he were circumcised, was ready to have it done; both his mother who had embraced the Jewish religion, and his tutor who was a Jew, dissuaded him from his purpose. Josephus represents the latter as saying, "That he was afraid lest such an action being once "become public to all, he should himself be in danger of "punishment, for having been the occasion of it, and having been the king's instructor in actions that were of ill "reputation; and he said, that he might worship God without being circumcised, even though he did resolve to follow the Jewish law entirely, which worship of God was "of a superior nature to circumcision. He added, that "God would forgive him, though he did not perform the operation, while it was omitted out of necessity, and for "fear of his subjects." Josephus' Antiquities, B. 20. Chap. 2. Sect. 4. Again in his own life, Sect. 23. he says, "At "this time it was that two great men, who were under the "jurisdiction of the king [Agrippa,] came to me out of the "region of Trachonitis, bringing their horses and their arms, "and carrying with them their money also; and when the "Jews would force them to be circumcised, if they would "stay among them, I would not permit them to have any "force put upon them, but said to them, "Every one "ought to worship God according to his own inclinations, "and not to be constrained by force; and that these men, "who had fled to us for protection, ought not to be so treated as to repent of their coming hither."

It certainly was, however, very popular amongst them. And so obstinately was it maintained by many, who professed to have embraced Christianity, that they gave great disturbance to several of the churches, even after the period to which this part of the sacred history belongs.

There is something unspeakably awful in presuming to dictate terms of salvation. Surely it is the prerogative of God alone to save and to condemn. He is fully entitled to require men, at their peril, to believe his word; and what he has revealed, we ought faithfully to declare, whether it be acceptable, or offensive to our fellow sinners. But the solemn sanction, with which the gospel is accompanied, ought to inspire us with the most sacred dread of making any alteration in the divine proclamation. Nothing can be more tremendous than the thought of attempting to enforce opinions of our own, by the terrors of the Lord; yet this is the sin of all those, who would add to the laws of the kingdom of Christ.

Their arrogance is extremely imposing and dangerous. The simple and unwary may think it impossible that language so high should ever be held without warrant. The timid may fear to gainsay, lest the danger alleged should prove to be real. No serious mind dares to trifle with eternal interests. Hence the alarm and distraction, which have been so often occasioned by "those grievous wolves who spare not the flock."

In

In verse 24th, it is said, that those who thus troubled the brethren at Antioch, "subverted "their souls." It became the duty, therefore, of those who "confirmed their souls," to oppose those troublers of the brethren. This accordingly we find they did; and the brethren were happily directed to ascertain the truth by means, to which neither party could possibly object, and by which the question was speedily settled for ever.

"When therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no "small dissension and disputation with them, they "determined that Paul and Barnabas, and cer- "tain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem "unto the apostles and elders about this ques- "tion."

Some read the beginning of the verse thus; "When therefore dissension arose, and Paul and "Barnabas had no small disputation with them*." If, agreeably to the common rendering, we understand the word "dissension," as applied to Paul and Barnabas in common with the judaizing teachers, we must consider the word as signifying merely the avowed and serious opposition which arose between them.

Men, who taught so great an error, were very properly resisted by Paul and Barnabas, with resolution and zeal. "Dissension and disputation" are extremely unpleasant; but the blame must lie

 with

* See Grotius on the place.

with those by whom they are excited, not with those who refuse to purchase tranquillity at the expence of truth. Many exclaim against all kinds of controversy, and especially against controversy of a religious nature. A controversial spirit is never to be defended. Every controversy is distressing, because it implies, on one side, or other, an attempt, through ignorance, or with design, to introduce error; and much mischief may follow the attempt. The obstinate violence with which religious disputes are maintained, is a humbling evidence of the strength of human corruption, and a great trial of the faith and patience of the people of God. To this trial, however, they are often called to submit. Much controversy is recorded even in the holy Scriptures. In every case, indeed, where truth is attacked, controversy is unavoidable. How could it have been avoided by faithful teachers in the church at Antioch? Or, how shall we expound the passage before us, without combating many conclusions which have been confidently drawn from it?

Hatred of religious controversy may sometimes be owing to indifference about the subject. Men do not hate the discussion of questions in which they feel an interest, unless they be doubtful of the goodness of their cause. Disputes in medicine, in politics, and in law, are at least as numerous, as acrimonious, and as endless, as any in divinity. Yet the valetudinarian, and the medi-

cal

cal student, are anxious to know what can be said for various or opposite modes of treatment. The great body of the nation are eager to read the reports of debates in Parliament. And the man of property, whose rights are contested, is unwearied in attending to the arguments, which affect his claim. If your hearts are set on the things of the world, we cannot hope for much of your attention to the defence of any of the truths of Christianity. But if ye believe that your treasure is in heaven, that the Scriptures, which testify of Christ, contain the charter of all your privileges, and are necessary for the instruction and salvation of men; it is impossible that ye should reject with disgust any serious attempt to vindicate their authority, or to ascertain their meaning.

In the conflict of opposite principles, it is better openly to argue the merits of the question, than, by indirect and concealed means, to injure the character, or the interests, of those of another persuasion. The malignant adversary is often, to appearance, the most placid and silent; while men, who enter into controversy with warmth and perseverance, give no less frequently the most convincing evidence, that, instead of violating, they are honestly obeying, the law of love.

How providential was it, that when the false teachers came down from Judea, Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch to oppose them. But for their timely and determined resistance, those

men might have done as much harm there, as was done, in the apostle's absence, in the churches of Galatia, of whom he says, "I am afraid of "you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in "vain." In this instance, the brethren were happily put upon their guard, and "they de- "termined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain "other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto "the apostles and elders about this question *."

In

* Some have supposed that the determination, here mentioned, was made not by the brethren, but by the presbytery of the church at Antioch, and that in that presbytery the false teachers were members as well as Paul and Barnabas. This, however, is a very improbable supposition, and has hardly been resorted to by any writer, except in the heat of controversy. Although the immediate antecedent to "they "determined," may from the construction of the sentence, seem to be Paul, Barnabas, and their opponents, or perhaps the latter only, yet in scripture, it is often necessary to seek the antecedent, further back than the immediately preceding clause. And the course of the narrative seems naturally to point to the brethren, as the persons who made this determination, in order to obtain satisfaction in a matter so interesting to them, and about which they heard such contradictory doctrine. The reading in Beza's manuscript, (now commonly called the Cambridge Manuscript) to which he refers on this passage†, will, upon examination, be found to confirm the view which we have given above. The words are: Γενομενης δε στασεως και ζητησεως ουκ ολιγης τω Παυλῳ και Βαρναβᾳ συν αυτοις, ελεγε γαρ ὁ Παυλος μενειν ουτως, καθως επιστευσαν, διισχυριζομενος· οι δε απηλυθοτες απο Ιερουσαλημ παρηγγειλαν αυτοις τῳ Παυλῳ και τῳ Βαρναβᾳ και τισιν αλλοις αναβαινειν προς τους αποστολους και πρεσβυτερους εις Ιερουσαλημ, ὁπως κριθωσιν επ' αυτων περι του ζητηματος τουτου. Οι μεν ουν προπεμφθεντες ὑπο της εκκλησιας, &c. "But when Paul and Bar-

"nabas

In the conduct of the brethren we see a spirit of investigation, which indicated unfeigned love of the truth. They desired to know, because they were willing to obey it. The demand, therefore, which was made upon them, however high, and unexpected, they would not reject, without carefully searching the matter to the bottom. In the determination they came to, they appear to have been favoured with divine direction. When Paul, in Gal. ii. 2, speaks of a journey to Jerusalem, which is commonly thought to be the same with that which is mentioned here*, he says, "I "went up by revelation." Perhaps the Holy Spirit

"nabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, "(for Paul insisted that they should remain so as *they were* "*when* they believed; but those who had come from Jeru- "salem charged them, viz. Paul and Barnabas, and certain "others, to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders, "that they might be judged by them, concerning this ques- "tion.) They therefore being brought on their way by the "church, went," &c. From this reading it would appear, that the journey to Jerusalem originated in an imperious demand of the false teachers, but was agreed to by the church, as well as by Paul and Barnabas, who were instructed by revelation to do so, and were, no doubt, confident of the issue. No great stress, however, can be laid on this reading, as the principal recommendation of the Cambridge Manuscript, is its agreement with the Syriac, and here it is not supported by that ancient version. I judge from the Latin translation in Walton's Polyglott.

* Mr. Paley objects to this opinion, but I think not on sufficient grounds. See his Horæ Paulinæ,—Epistle to the Galatians.

rit intimated his will in a similar manner to that in which (chap. xiii. 2.) he called for the labours of Paul and Barnabas in the journey from which they had lately returned; and a resolution to comply followed of course in the one case, as well as in the other. Or, if the determination of the brethren was made under the ordinary influence of that wisdom which is profitable to direct, Paul and Barnabas might be instructed by revelation to acquiesce. Which ever way managed, the determination itself was evidently reasonable and wise.

The false teachers having alleged the authority of the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem*, it was necessary to send thither to detect the imposture. It was the custom of such teachers, even after this period, to call in question the apostleship of Paul, and to represent him as differing in doctrine from the apostles of the circumcision. How audaciously would they have done so, even to his face, had not this journey been the means of disproving their assertions.

Again, it was at Jerusalem, that the preaching of the gospel had its beginning. From the church there, the word of God came out to Antioch†, and to all the world. From it, the other churches derived their church order, and all the ordinances of Christ. Before the Scriptures were completed, and in the primitive purity of apostolic times,

* See verses 1, 2, 24, 25, 26. † Acts xi. 19—30.

times, the doctrine and practice of older churches, or of a mother church, deserved the highest respect. Hence we find Paul, in 1 Cor. xiv. 33, inforcing his directions by a reference to the state of other churches. "God is not the *author* of "confusion but of peace, as in all churches of "the saints." And to prevent them from setting up their own customs in opposition to those of others, he says, verse 36, "What? came the "word of God out from you? or came it unto "you only?" It was of the utmost consequence, then, for the church at Antioch, and for all Gentile believers, to know whether they had received all the doctrines of the church at Jerusalem, (especially as the Holy Spirit had been poured out so generally on the members of that church, Acts ii. 1, &c. and iv. 31.); nor could they have peace in their minds, while any pretending to be of that church, declared that those, who were without circumcision, were not to be considered as in a state of salvation*.

Further, except Paul himself, all the apostles appear to have been still at Jerusalem. This seems evident from the language of the historian in the whole passage before us. Thus, "they "determined that Paul and Barnabas, and cer-"tain others of them, should go up to Jerusa-"lem unto THE APOSTLES and Elders"—"when they were come, they were received of "the

* See Glas's Speech before the Commission.

" the church and of THE APOSTLES and El-
" ders"—" THE APOSTLES and Elders came
" together"—" then it pleased THE APOSTLES
" and Elders, with the whole church, to send
" chosen men"—" they wrote letters by them
" after this manner; THE APOSTLES, and El-
" ders, and Brethren send greeting"—" And
" after they had tarried there a space," (that is, at Antioch) " they were let go in peace from the
" Brethren unto THE APOSTLES." In all these places, by " the Apostles" we must understand, all the Apostles, or the Apostles in general; just as by " the Elders," we understand, all the Elders, or the Elders in general. It does not appear, that the Apostles were sent to, invited, or called in from abroad, to attend on this occasion; but the Christians at Antioch supposed, or rather knew, that the Apostles were at Jerusalem, and therefore directly sent thither to them. None of them, indeed, are expressly named as speakers, besides Peter and James; but all the rest may have been present. How often, in the gospels, and in the beginning of the Acts, is Peter the only speaker, when we know that all the rest were present. In Gal. ii. 8, 9, 10. Paul speaks of conferences with three, namely, James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars. Here is one more mentioned as present at Jerusalem, besides the two before taken notice of; and there must have been others besides these three, who

seemed

seemed to be pillars, or were the most eminent*.

It was surely of importance, that a question, respecting which it was adviseable to make inquiry at Jerusalem, should be settled, while the Apostles were there. It was to them, therefore, in the first instance, that the brethren at Antioch directed their messengers. The Elders, who are joined with the Apostles in the Brethren's determination, were probably endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Besides, the message was intended to ascertain not merely a point of doctrine, but also a point of fact, not merely whether Gentile believers must be circumcised, but whether the men from Judea had been sent by the church at Jerusalem to teach the brethren at Antioch to this effect. An inquiry respecting pretended messengers from the church was naturally addressed to the Elders of the church. At any rate, it is not wonderful that the brethren at Antioch should have joined the Apostles and Elders together in their message; when the Apostles sometimes class themselves in the same manner†, and on this occasion, take along with them not only the Elders, but the whole church, in their reply. It is observable, however, that those whom the brethren at Antioch determined to consult, were not the church at Jerusalem, but solely the Apostles and Elders; and although

 the

* See Lardner, vol. vi. chap. 6. † See 1 Pet. v. 1.

the whole church approved of the decision, and was included in the reply, yet the letter was said to contain "the decrees that were ordained of "the Apostles and Elders which were at Jeru- "salem," chap. xvi. 4.

It seems evident, that in complying with the determination of the brethren at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas did not place themselves on a level with the false teachers, nor even acknowledge any inferiority to the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem. Paul, in all his epistles, maintains the validity of his individual apostolic authority. "I suppose," says he, that is, "I conclude, I "was not a whit behind the very chiefest Apos- "tles," 2 Cor. xi. 5. And when speaking apparently of this very journey, and of his meeting at Jerusalem with the chiefest Apostles, he says, "they who seemed to be somewhat, in confer- "ence added nothing to me." Gal. ii. 6.—It was the will of God, therefore, that Paul and Barnabas should now comply with the wishes of the brethren, that opportunity might be given to the Apostles, and Elders, and to the whole brethren of the original church of the circumcision, to declare by a written deed, their unanimous agreement with the Apostle of the Gentiles, respecting the liberty of the Gentiles from the Mosaic Law.

The persons sent according to this determination, were "Paul and Barnabas, and certain o- "ther of them." Paul and Barnabas had distinguished

tinguished themselves in resisting the doctrine taught as from Judea: it was right that they should be employed in detecting its falsehood. It was also right, that "other" members of the church at Antioch should be sent along with them, that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established. Even in temporal things, Paul encouraged churches to send members chosen by themselves to certify his fidelity (1 Cor. xvi. 3, 4.); how much more was it proper in spiritual things! From Gal. ii. it is probable that Titus was one of the persons chosen on this occasion.—It is possible that some of the false teachers might also go up to Jerusalem, but it is not probable. Conscious of having had no authority from the church there, they would be afraid to meet detection. We have no account of their journey. The persons mentioned, verse 5th, do not appear to have been the false teachers come from Antioch, but persons of the same opinion who resided at Jerusalem. In the letter, which was sent from Jerusalem, the false teachers are spoken of as absent*.

The "question," about which inquiry was to be made, involved the terms, on which the

 union

* See verse 24. "Forasmuch as we have heard, that cer-
"tain which went out from us have troubled you with
"words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circum-
"cised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* com-
"mandment;"

union between Jew and Gentile in Christ was to be finally adjusted. When that should be decided, no similar question could ever arise again, because no such separation would remain to be taken away. Accordingly, nothing like it occurs afterwards in Scripture history, and nothing like the reference described here is said to have been made on any other question. If any such question could occur, since the close of that history, it could never be decided, in a similar manner; because the gifts of the Spirit are no longer conferred on the Elders of churches, and the Apostles, whose voice certainly would be of principal consequence for giving weight to any decision, have all finished their course. The question itself, therefore, and the method of bringing it to a decision, are equally singular. This reference from the church at Antioch to the Apostles and Elders in the church at Jerusalem cannot be justly pleaded as a precedent for any thing, but an appeal to inspired authority; and that is now to be found, neither at Jerusalem, nor any where else, in a human assembly, but solely in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. No precedent can authorise a practice, which does not in fact correspond with the alleged example, and has been adopted in circumstances which are not similar. And the case before us bears no resemblance whatever to any of the subordinations, which have since been established, between one church and another; or between

between many congregations, and the government, whether of an individual Lord Bishop, or of a Representative Ecclesiastical Judicatory*.

The two next verses give an account of the journey to Jerusalem, and of the reception which the messengers met with there from the church.

"And being brought on their way by the "church, they passed through Phenice and Sa- "maria, declaring the conversion of the Gen- "tiles: and they caused great joy to all the "brethren. And when they were come to Je- "rusalem they were received of the church, and "of the Apostles and Elders, and they declared "all things that God had done with them."

"Being brought on their way," signifies that they were furnished with such necessaries and accommodations, as might expedite their journey, and perhaps, in token of affection and esteem, some of the church might accompany them part of the way. Such expressions of brotherly love are very useful, and encouraging to labourers in the work of the Lord; and they are called for, even by the principles of equity, towards those who are engaged, as the messengers here were in the service of the church. They are mentioned, and greatly commended in various parts of the New Testament†.

Phenice

* See Appendix.

† See chap. xx. 38. & xxi. 5.—Rom. xv. 24.—1 Cor. xvi. 6, 11.—2 Cor. i. 16.—Tit. iii. 13.—3 John, 6.

Phenice and Samaria are in the way from Antioch to Jerusalem. Inquiring in every place, "who was worthy," and being probably well known as Apostles, in consequence of former journies, or readily giving the signs of an Apostle; Paul and Barnabas had access to the churches as they passed along. Every where they declared "the conversion of the Gentiles," not merely the fact, which could hardly be still unknown in those parts, but how extensively it had taken place, especially during the wide circuit from which they had lately returned. They were not so much engrossed by the particular question which occasioned their journey, as to be incapable of speaking on any other subject. And they knew that nothing was more likely to open the minds of the Jewish believers, than making them acquainted with the events which had recently taken place, among the benighted Gentiles. By this intelligence "they caused great "joy to all the brethren." However fond many of the believing Jews might be of imposing the Mosaic Law on Gentile converts, it could not now offend them that such converts were made. It was no longer a question with those who had heard of the case of Cornelius, whether God had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. The point now to be determined was, whether the conversion of the Gentiles was enough, or whether any thing more was necessary to salvation? Those who were zealous of the law, might,

perhaps,

perhaps, anticipate the imposition of it, wherever they heard of the triumphs of the cross. The great joy, therefore, of all the brethren, although a presumption that they were not universally, or even generally of the opinion of the false teachers at Antioch, was consistent enough with the controversy, which had been excited among them, not only at Antioch, but probably also in other places.

On their arrival at Jerusalem, "they were re- "ceived of the Church" as Brethren, "and *of* "the Apostles and Elders" as persons charged with a message particularly to them. "They "declared all things that God had done with "them." They publicly spoke of the success with which God had crowned their labours among the Gentiles; but they seem, in the first instance, to have explained privately their doctrine of the liberty of the Gentiles from the Mosaic Law. For, in Gal. ii. 2, Paul says, "I com- "municated unto them that gospel which I "preach among the Gentiles, but privately to "them which were of reputation, lest by any "means I should run, or had run, in vain." It is probable, from verse 12th of the chapter before us, that the multitude would not at first have heard this doctrine with patience. In questions which are new, and likely to awaken the jealousy of prejudice, it may be very necessary to begin by imparting our views to a select few, before we proclaim them in full assembly, that the judi-

cious

cious may not be taken by surprise, nor the simple irritated, while no sufficient preparation has been made for giving them instruction.

Even of those, who heard the doctrine of Paul and Barnabas in private, some appear to have urged the same demand, which had troubled the church at Antioch; and they probably wished to have their demand instantly complied with, in the case of Titus, who was a Greek, (Gal. ii. 3.)

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the "Pharisees * which believed, saying that it was "needful to circumcise them, and to command "them to keep the law of Moses."

As the meeting of the Apostles and Elders with the Church to consider of this matter, is mentioned afterwards, it is likely that this opinion was now offered in the more private meeting, of which we have just been speaking. The persons, who offered it, were of the sect of the Pharisees. As they retained their judaism, so did they the distinction of sects among the Jews.

After

* Some understand this verse as a part of the narrative of Paul and Barnabas, and connect it with the foregoing verse thus: they declared all things that God had done with them. "But, *said they*, some of the sect of the Pharisees, who be-"lieved, have risen up, saying; that it was needful," &c. See the Latin translation of the Syriac, Pearce, Beausobre and L'Enfant, and Newcome. If this view be correct, the verse contains the Apostles account of the false teachers at Antioch, and the much disputing (verse 7.) was made by persons at Jerusalem of similar principles, when the question came to be considered in public.

After the resurrection of Christ, the Pharisees were less opposed to the hope of the gospel than the Sadducees, who said there was no resurrection, and who early distinguished themselves in the persecution of the Apostles†. On one occasion, Paul having, in distinction from the Sadducees, declared himself a Pharisee, was even defended by the Pharisees‡. But while their belief of a resurrection inclined them to embrace the hope of the gospel, they sometimes remained utter strangers to the spirit of the gospel. Thus, the persons, here spoken of, did not, like Paul, count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. They were not the circumcision, described (Phil. iii.) as having no confidence in the flesh. They seemed to think that they might glory in this, that as touching the Law, they were Pharisees, and, with the true spirit of their sect, they wished to compass sea and land to make proselytes to pharisaical judaism, of the Gentile converts to Christianity. They are here said to have "believed." But if they be the same who are alluded to in Gal. ii. their faith was mere pretence. For Paul there says of them, that they were "false brethren "unawares brought in, who came in privily to "spy out our liberty which we have in Christ "Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. "To whom we gave place by subjection, no not

 "for

† See chap. iv. 1. & v. 17. ‡ See chap. xxiii. 6—9.

" for an hour, that the truth of the gospel " might continue with you."

Thus, not only was the question brought by the messengers from Antioch, but the dispute in which it had originated there, was actually revived at Jerusalem.—The next verse informs us what means were used to bring it to a conclusion.

" And the Apostles and Elders came together " for to consider of this matter."

" This matter," or, as it might be rendered, " this saying," having been spoken in presence of the Apostles and Elders, and being the same with that about which inquiry was made at them, by the church at Antioch; they felt themselves called upon to consider it, and to come together for this purpose. It appears from the sequel, that they came together in a meeting of the whole church, who are spoken of, not only as witnesses of what was done, but as uniting in the deed. The subject related to doctrine which had been publicly taught by members of that church, and was itself of general concern; it was therefore proper that it should be brought before the whole church.

It is argued by many, that this meeting is an instance of a representative church, consisting of delegates from several congregations. They contend that the number of disciples at Jerusalem was too great to admit of their coming together into one place; that, therefore, many particular congregations

congregations were under one government. Some say, it was an Episcopal government, some a Presbyterian one; and according to their respective views, they call the assembly here described, either the Council, or the Synod of Jerusalem. On this passage, indeed, is founded the great argument from the New Testament, for subjecting particular congregations to one administration, which may form the ecclesiastical government in a National Church. It is a remarkable circumstance, that all who hold this meeting at Jerusalem to be a representative church, seem fond of supposing an analogy between sacred and civil institutions, and are, in their church capacity, either actually allied to the State, or willing to be so, if they can get into favour and power; whereas those who reject this notion, generally maintain that the institutions of the kingdom of Christ are quite different from those of this world, and acknowledge, that, in their church capacity, they have no title to privileges above any of the other subjects of the state.

There seems to be no reason why believers in the same city should not divide into two or more churches, when circumstances recommend the measure, as necessary, or useful. The inconvenience of a crowd in one place, may be as great as the inconvenience of collecting individuals from very distant places. It does not appear, however, to be the fact, that any such division

became necessary in any of the churches in the New Testament. Far less is there any example in Scripture of one church, being subdivided into congregations, and governed by the bishops or presbyters of each, constituting a council to decide for the whole. A system of church government, then, which rests on the supposed necessity, or expediency of such a case, will find no precedents in its favour, in the holy Scriptures. It must be content with such as are of inferior authority, and more modern date*.

That the church at Jerusalem was sometimes obliged by persecution to meet in separate companies, is evident from chap. xii. 5, 12, 17. where the church is said to have been making continual prayer for Peter, and he is said to have told his deliverance to a part of them in the house of Mary, and sent a message to James and the rest, assembled probably in some other houses. But, at the time referred to in the passage before us, they might meet as usual, for the persecution treated of in chapter 12th, had ceased at the death of Herod; and if we review the whole history of this church, in the book of the Acts, we shall see, that as the church was one, so the place of meeting, usually, was one. That their numbers did not prevent their meeting in one place, we have direct evidence; for where their numbers are mentioned, their meeting in one place is

* See Appendix.

is also mentioned*. In estimating their numbers, we must not reckon all the additions, which were made at different times, into one sum, but make large allowance for death, and dispersion. Every one acquainted with a church list knows what accessions are requisite for merely keeping up the number, even in ordinary situations. How much more would accessions be needed, in the city of Jerusalem, a place of resort at particular seasons, (at one of which the first great increase took place,) where the converts were many of them from a distance, and soon to return to their respective countries; where persecution, and zeal to propagate the gospel, combined to disperse them abroad. In chapter xxi. 20. where the highest account of their numbers is given, the phrase "many myriads," or "ten "thousands," is evidently an indefinite expression. We rejoice in admitting that it signifies, very many. But the passage does not necessarily imply, that James and the Elders were speaking of the numbers of believers in the city of Jerusalem, but rather of the numbers of believers of the Jewish nation. "Thou seest," that is, thou art sensible, "Brother, how many thou-"sands of Jews there are which believe, and "they are all zealous of the law." But if we should grant that these words referred to the numbers actually in the city at that time; still those

* See chap. ii. 41—47. & v. 12. & xxi. 20—22.

those very many are not said to be all members of the church at Jerusalem; and very many of them were most likely believing Jews, assembled from various quarters at Jerusalem to celebrate the day of Pentecost. For the probability of this supposition we may appeal to the haste made by Paul, if possible, to be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and to the increasing number of fellow travellers, who joined company with him on the road*. After all, however, no inference is drawn from the many myriads of believers, that it would be impossible for them to meet in one place. We have an inference of a very different kind. "What is it therefore? the multi-"tude" (not the pastors and a few delegates from the rest, but the multitude) "must needs come "together." The number of disciples, then, said to have been at Jerusalem, cannot prove, that the church there must have comprehended a plurality of congregations. And it cannot be so much as supposed, from the language of the New Testament, that a church of Christ should ever be understood to include all the congregations of a country, or kingdom; far less, all the inhabitants of a kingdom; and least of all, a society of a particular denomination pretending an exclusive or superior claim, above all other Christian

* See chap. xx. 16. & xxi. 16.

Christian societies, to the faith and obedience of the natives of a kingdom†.

The account of what passed at the meeting of the Apostles and Elders, contains a speech of the Apostle Peter, which procured a hearing from the multitude to Paul and Barnabas, and a speech from the Apostle James, who gave that judgment in which the Apostles, Elders, and Brethren were pleased to acquiesce.

Peter rose up, "when there had been much "disputing." From his speech, which reproves the disputants as "tempting God," this "disput-"ing" appears to have consisted of the eager contendings of those, mentioned verse 5th, who wished to impose the Mosaic Law upon the Gentiles. They laboured to maintain their cause and carry their point; and possibly their arguments might have seemed strong to many, had not the Apostles, with irresistible evidence, vindicated the truth.

It seems a great mistake to infer, as some have done, from the circumstance before us, that every case which concerns a church, should be made the subject of public debate, or that, in such cases, debate is the proper and ordinary means of arriving

† King has shewn that the largest churches in the world, even in the third century, were no more than so many single congregations. See his Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church, chapter 2d.

riving at a decision. That truth, when attacked, must be defended, has already been granted. That debates may be sometimes excited by the ignorant, or designing, in the most flourishing churches, the whole of this passage sufficiently shows. But the example of the Apostles shows also, that we ought rather to repress, than to encourage the practice. They bore the disputants with great patience, but not without reproof, which commanded silence, and effectually prevented the reiterations of obstinacy. It may be observed generally, that Christians are cautioned against meeting for strife and debate*. And Timothy and Titus are counselled to avoid, and to refuse to give heed to debates†. How unlike the spirit of these precepts, is the mode, in which business is managed in many churches! We speak not here of those ecclesiastical Courts, in which debate is a matter of course, and the parties are as well known beforehand, as in any civil Court, in which counsel are retained for plaintiff and defendant. We speak of the practice of those, who, being jealous of Christian liberty, think that every measure, however trifling or obvious, should be brought before the church for general discussion, or for obtaining a public declaration of the opinion of each member, before

* See Isaiah lviii. 4. Rom. i. 29. 2 Cor. xii. 20.

† See 1 Tim. i. 3, 4. & vi. 3—5. 2 Tim. ii. 16. Tit. iii. 9.

fore the office-bearers shall presume to put it into practice. Now this seems by no means agreeable to the directions given to the primitive churches. From these, it is plain, that the office-bearers are to feed the flock, that is, to govern them by instruction and persuasion, according to the word of God. In doing this, they are intitled, nay bound, to carry into effect the rules of Scripture, and to require obedience from the church to those rules when laid before them‡. A different conduct deprives the church of the benefit of government, must give continual encouragement to dissension, and is likely to make discipline degenerate into an engine of faction.

Nothing is less likely to serve the cause of truth, or even the cause of Christian liberty, than making every thing, that ought to be done, wait for discussion in full assembly. If the church contains the collective wisdom, it contains also the collective ignorance of the brethren: if it combines their gifts and their grace, it combines also their infirmities and corruption. Where every thing must undergo discussion, some may be in danger of thinking they have laws to make, instead of laws to obey. A few of the most active spirit, and readiest elocution, will become the real movers and managers in every business; and a part will thus be put for

 the

‡ See Acts xx. 28. 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5. Tit. i. 9, 10, 11. Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Pet. v. 1—5.

the whole. When they are agreed, every thing must be complied with: when they are at variance, every thing must be objected to. No tyranny is so bad as that of a cabal, that is, of those who are uppermost for the moment in the fermentation of anarchy. Debate, when indulged, is favourable to the introduction of this sort of tyranny. It heats the passions; warps the judgment; hurries men to measures of violence and precipitation; engages them to the side which they happen to have taken; inclines them to contention and tedious consultation about matters of the most trivial importance; and makes them be ever on the watch, to satisfy a restless disposition, by seizing an opportunity to interfere. In short, those who most need restraint, are, by such means, in danger of being led to set it at defiance; while the peaceful, and those to whom the government is committed nominally, are terrified, and chained down by the turbulence of the rest. —When any thing must be brought before the church for consideration, the brethren must certainly signify their judgment concerning it. But, in this case, great care must be taken that all things be done decently, and in order; and it seems to be the duty of those who have the oversight, to maintain order.—If a Christian be offended by the conduct of the office-bearers, the Scriptures direct him how to proceed in that, as in any other case of offence. And where the union is voluntary, as it always ought to be, those

who

who cannot make their brethren hear them, in what they believe to be the doctrine of Scripture, are at perfect liberty, as they are in duty bound, from "such brethren to turn away," 2 Tim. iii. 5.

The speech of Peter furnishes an excellent specimen of the manner, in which, when disputes have arisen, we ought to bring them to a conclusion. He does not peremptorily command silence, but with a dignified simplicity, he makes a short, plain, appeal to two facts, well known to all present, from which he shews, to the meanest capacity, the unreasonableness of the doctrine which was so warmly contended for. The one was, the fact of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his company; the other was, the fact of their own faith respecting the way of salvation.

In recapitulating the history of his mission to Cornelius, he intimates, that the gift of the Holy Spirit, on that occasion, was a token from God, that those Gentiles, on hearing the gospel, were made real believers in Christ; that in thus bearing witness to them, God, "who knoweth the "hearts, put no difference between" Jewish believers and them; for although, as Gentiles, they might be thought outwardly unclean, for want of the purifications of the Law, yet God had "purified their hearts by faith." His inference is very strongly expressed.

"Now, therefore, why tempt ye God to put

" a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which " neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

It is highly offensive to God, when men attempt to impose any burden on their fellow-creatures, in matters of conscience, which he either never intended them to bear, or hath been pleased to remove. This provocation is the more heinous and glaring, that those who are guilty of it, generally contrive to exempt themselves. Our Saviour and his Apostles guard us against imitating their example, or submitting to their tyranny. " Do not ye after their works: for they say and " do not. For they bind heavy burdens, and " grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's " shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move " them with one of their fingers," Matth. xxiii. 3, 4.—" Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty " wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be " not entangled again with the yoke of bond- " age," Gal.v. 1. " For neither they themselves " who are circumcised keep the Law: but desire " to have you circumcised, that they may glory " in your flesh," Gal. vi. 13.

In calling the Law of Moses, " a yoke which " neither they nor their fathers were able to " bear," Peter is frequently understood to refer to the numerous ritual precepts, the costly sacrifices, and the frequent journies to Jerusalem required by the Law. These things are supposed to have made the observance of it difficult and irksome. It may be questioned, however, whether

ther, in this sense, the Law was ever felt to be an unbearable yoke. Numerous and expensive as the ritual institutions were, a blessing of riches was connected with obedience, which enabled the worshippers not only to do what was required, but to make voluntary vows, and to offer many a free-will offering. Where poverty did take place, less costly sacrifices were allowed. The journies to Jerusalem, instead of being felt a hardship, were celebrated as delightful opportunities of festival enjoyment. "I was glad when they "said unto me, Let us go into the house of the "Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, "O Jerusalem, Psalm cxxii. 1, 2. "They go "from strength to strength: *every one of them* "in Zion appeareth before God," Psalm lxxxiv. 7. Such is the language of Scripture respecting the Jewish fathers.—The disposition to idolatry, which so long prevailed, did not arise from a desire to save trouble or expence. For the demands of idolatrous worship seem to have been far higher than those of the worship of the God of Israel. The true God is one; but idols were innumerable, and each had its appropriate service. Besides the sacrifice of their cattle, that of their sons and daughters was required for idols. And while the service of the God of Israël was rendered easy, by the prosperity which attended it, that of idols became increasingly severe, in consequence of the desolating judgments by which it was punished.—In later times, the Jews

were

were "all zealous of the Law." Their attachment to its ritual was one great reason of their prevailing enmity against the gospel, and the well known cause, even among those who believed, of the very attempt which Peter reproves.

His language, therefore, respecting the law, as an unbearable yoke, seems rather to apply to that imperfection, remarked by Paul*, that it could not purge the conscience from sin†. An unbearable yoke may be understood by contrasting it with a yoke that is easy. Christ calls his yoke easy, and his burden light‡, not because it puts us to less trouble and expence than the Mosaic Law did, for it requires us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow him; rather than do which, men often show that they would offer, if they could, thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil. It is easy, because in taking it upon us, we find rest to our souls. "Being justified by faith, we have peace "with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; by "whom also we have access into this grace "wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the "glory of God; and not only so, but we glory "in tribulations also," Rom. v. 1, 2, 3. On the other hand, the yoke, mentioned here by Peter, was a law which could not give life§; a killing letter,

* Heb. ix. 9. & x. 1, 2.

† See Whitby on the place.

‡ Matth. xi. 30.

§ Gal. iii. 21.

letter, leaving men under condemnation‖, and making it necessary that they should believe in Christ, that they might be redeemed from the curse of the law¶. Hence the glad tidings of the gospel to the Jews are expressed thus: "Be it "known unto you, therefore, brethren, that "through this man is preached unto you the "forgiveness of sins: and by him all that be-"lieve are justified from all things, from which "ye could not be justified by the Law of Mo-"ses," Acts xiii. 38, 39. This interpretation of the phrase before us, is countenanced by the connexion; for the words which follow, treat of the manner, in which those who found no rest under the yoke of the Law, believed that they should be saved.

"But we believe that through the grace of "the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even "as they."

This fact of their belief is the second thing to which Peter appeals, for showing the unreasonableness of the doctrine of the judaizing teachers. The believing Jews had no other ground of hope for salvation, than the believing Gentiles had. This was the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, or, that free favour for his people, which he showed in giving himself for them. The merit of this sacrifice is the only confidence of every real Christian,

‖ 2 Cor. iii. 6—9.
¶ Gal. iii. 13.

Christian, for it neither requires, nor admits of, any thing in addition to it. It was quite inconsistent, therefore, in believing Jews to say, that believing Gentiles, already justified by faith, must be circumcised and keep the Law, in order to their salvation.

It is remarkable that this argument was afterwards used against Peter himself*, when he was withstood to the face by Paul, because he was to be blamed. The cases were not indeed the very same. Here, the question was, if circumcision was necessary to the salvation of Gentile believers. Afterwards, it was, if Jewish believers should eat and have familiar intercourse with Gentile believers. The spirit, however, of the decision in the case before us, might certainly have superseded the other question. And Peter was blameable also, for his fear of man, and his dissimulation. Although he might adhere to the letter of the decision now made, his behaviour at Antioch was "a compelling of the Gentile "brethren to live as did the Jews," if ever they wished to be treated with cordiality. Hence, the substance of his own argument was used to reprove him. "We who are Jews by nature, and "not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a "man is not justified by the works of the Law, "but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have "believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified

* Gal. ii. 15, 16.

" tified by the faith of Christ, and not by the " works of the Law: for by the works of the " Law shall no flesh be justified."

The speech of Peter was addressed more immediately to those who contended for imposing the Mosaic Law. It had the effect of putting them to silence, and indeed of calming the whole multitude, who were sufficiently prejudiced of themselves, and had probably been considerably inflamed by " the much disputing " which had taken place. They were now, however, willing to give Paul and Barnabas a patient hearing.

" Then all the multitude kept silence, and " gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declar- " ing what miracles and wonders God had " wrought among the Gentiles by them."

" All the multitude," here, are called " the " whole church," in verse 22d. Being prevailed with to listen to a faithful account of the doings of the Lord, they were prepared for joining in the decision, which was about to be given. As Peter had argued from the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas very seasonably confirmed his argument, by " declar- " ing what miracles and wonders God had " wrought among the Gentiles by them," not only at Antioch, but in all the places which they had been directed by the Holy Spirit to visit.

Nothing was now wanting to satisfy the church, as to the proper conclusion of this business, but to show, that the recent propagation of the gos-

Christian, for it neither requires, nor admits of, any thing in addition to it. It was quite inconsistent, therefore, in believing Jews to say, that believing Gentiles, already justified by faith, must be circumcised and keep the Law, in order to their salvation.

It is remarkable that this argument was afterwards used against Peter himself*, when he was withstood to the face by Paul, because he was to be blamed. The cases were not indeed the very same. Here, the question was, if circumcision was necessary to the salvation of Gentile believers. Afterwards, it was, if Jewish believers should eat and have familiar intercourse with Gentile believers. The spirit, however, of the decision in the case before us, might certainly have superseded the other question. And Peter was blameable also, for his fear of man, and his dissimulation. Although he might adhere to the letter of the decision now made, his behaviour at Antioch was "a compelling of the Gentile "brethren to live as did the Jews," if ever they wished to be treated with cordiality. Hence, the substance of his own argument was used to reprove him. "We who are Jews by nature, and "not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a "man is not justified by the works of the Law, "but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have "believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified

* Gal. ii. 15, 16.

" tified by the faith of Christ, and not by the " works of the Law: for by the works of the " Law shall no flesh be justified."

The speech of Peter was addressed more immediately to those who contended for imposing the Mosaic Law. It had the effect of putting them to silence, and indeed of calming the whole multitude, who were sufficiently prejudiced of themselves, and had probably been considerably inflamed by " the much disputing " which had taken place. They were now, however, willing to give Paul and Barnabas a patient hearing.

" Then all the multitude kept silence, and " gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declar- " ing what miracles and wonders God had " wrought among the Gentiles by them."

" All the multitude," here, are called " the " whole church," in verse 22d. Being prevailed with to listen to a faithful account of the doings of the Lord, they were prepared for joining in the decision, which was about to be given. As Peter had argued from the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas very seasonably confirmed his argument, by " declar- " ing what miracles and wonders God had " wrought among the Gentiles by them," not only at Antioch, but in all the places which they had been directed by the Holy Spirit to visit.

Nothing was now wanting to satisfy the church, as to the proper conclusion of this business, but to show, that the recent propagation of the gos-

pel among the Gentiles was agreeable to the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. To do this was the leading object of the speech of the Apostle James.

" And after they had held their peace, James " answered saying, Brethren, hearken unto me. " Simeon hath declared how God at the first did " visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people " for his name.. And to this agree the words of " the prophets; as it is written, After this I will " return, and I will build again the tabernacle of " David, which is fallen down: and I will build " again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: " that the residue of men might seek after the " Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my " name is called, saith the Lord, who doth all " these things. Known unto God are all his " works, from the beginning of the world. " Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble " not them, which from among the Gentiles are " turned to God: but that we write unto them, " that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and " *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, " and *from* blood. For Moses of old time hath " in every city them that preach him, being read " in the synagogues every Sabbath day."

It is said, " James answered." To answer, in Scripture language, does not necessarily suppose a question to which it is a reply, but is used of any speech which corresponds in a general way to what went before. In Matthew xi. 25. we have

have an instance of its referring to what had been said by the speaker himself. In this passage, it signifies that the speech of James was in the same strain with that of Peter, and with those of Paul and Barnabas, which immediately preceded it. They were all of one mind and one judgment, and they all spoke to the same purpose.

The quotation made here by the Apostle is taken from Amos ix. 11, 12. "In that day will "I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fal- "len, and close up the breaches thereof, and I "will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in "the days of old: that they may possess the "remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen "which are called by my name, saith the Lord, "that doth this." This reading of the passage, especially in the 12th verse, where "Edom" is substituted (by the addition in the original of a single letter) for the word "Adam," signifying "men," is considerably different from the Apostle's quotation, and evidently less adapted to his purpose. The correctness of this reading is, therefore, liable to suspicion, and the suspicion is increased by other circumstances. That the Jews faithfully kept the sacred oracles, at least in as far as they related to the Messiah, so long as the Jewish dispensation lasted (which was the period during which those oracles had been committed to their care) may be inferred from this fact, that Christ never charged them with trea-

chery in this particular. But there is good reason to believe‡, that, afterwards, especially in the second, third, and fourth centuries, when this honourable trust had been taken from the Jews and committed to the churches of Christ, and when Christians had long pressed the Jews with quotations from the Old Testament, proving that Jesus was the Christ; that blinded people so hated the light as to endeavour to corrupt some of the passages which used to be quoted against them, and particularly such as had been introduced into the writings of the New Testament. The Christians of that period chiefly used the Greek version, and were not generally acquainted with the Hebrew original. It was the artifice of the Jews therefore, to corrupt the original, and then to allege that the Christians deceived themselves with an inaccurate translation. This fact, which some of the Christian fathers did not fail to detect†, will be found to account for those variations in the quotations of the New Testament, which have so often perplexed the serious reader.

‡ See Kennicott's Dissertatio Generalis, 67, 68.

† Thus, Justin Martyr, who became a Christian little more than thirty years after the death of the Apostle John, and wrote his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, about the middle of the second century, says, "Magistri vestri asseverare au-" dent, interpretationem LXX in quibusdam locis minus esse " veram: quæ aperte in sacris literis videntur insipientem sui-" que amantem sententiam eorum carpere, ea non ita scrip-" ta esse dicere audent.—Ac quod magistri vestri multos et

er. Happily these corruptions were not attempted, till the Scriptures of the Old Testament had been widely dispersed among the Gentiles, and secured by translation into various languages. In

" integros prorsus locos ex translatione LXX sustulerint, " scire vos volo.—Resectio ista ex Jeremiâ adhuc in quibus- " dam exemplaribus, quæ in judæorum asservantur synagogis, " scripta reperitur: non enim ita diu est, cum hæc verba re- " ciderunt."—" Your Rabbis presume to assert, that the translation of the Seventy is in some places false; those places in the holy Scriptures which seem openly to condemn their foolish and self-conceited opinion, they presume to say are not so in the original."—" And I would have you know, that your Rabbis have taken away many and whole passages out of the Septuagint translation."—" That retrenchment from Jeremiah is found written in some of the copies which are kept in the Jewish synagogues: for it is not so long since they cut off these words."—Finally, Justin affirms, that he did not argue—" ex eis Scripturæ locis, quos ipsi non agnos- " citis; sed ex dictis, quæ hucusque recepta fatemini esse: " quæ si intellexissent magistri vestri, credite illos ea expunc- " turos fuisse"—" from those passages of Scripture, which ye yourselves do not acknowledge; but from words which ye still confess to be found there, which if your Rabbis had understood, believe it, they would have expunged them." In like manner, Irenæus, who died in the year 202, says, " Si Judæi cognovissent, nos usuros his testimoniis, quæ sunt " ex Scripturis; nunquam dubitassent ipsi suas comburere " scripturas." Edit. Oxon. 1702, pag. 253. " Had the Jews known that we would have used these proofs, which are taken from the Scriptures; they would never have hesitated to burn their Scriptures." Similar strictures may be met with in Tertullian, Origen, Augustin and many others. Even Jerome, although peculiarly attached to rabbinical in-

In the instance before us, it may be observed, that there is no mention of Edom in any other part of the prophecy; that James made his quotation in a church of Hebrews, evidently without supposing he could be told that his reading was incorrect, (which is a presumptive proof that there was no various reading of the passage in his day); and that the reading of James is supported by the Septuagint, by the Arabic, by some manuscripts of the Syriac, and by Eusebius. By the assistance of these ancient versions, as well as the authority of an inspired Apostle, the true reading has been restored thus:

" In that day I will raise up the fallen tabernacle
of David,
" And I will close up the breaches thereof:
" And I will raise up its ruins,
" And I will build it as *in* the days of old:
" That the residue of men may seek Jehovah,
" And

struction, often accuses the Jews of wilfully corrupting the Scriptures. " Cogimur ad Hebræos recurrere, et scientiæ " veritatem de fonte magis quam de rivulis quærere: praeser- " tim, quum non prophetia aliqua de Christo; ubi solent " tergiversari, et veritatem celare mendacio." (Tom. 3, 1752.) " We are obliged to have recourse to the Hebrews, and to seek the truth from the fountain rather than the streams: especially, when it is not a prophecy concerning Christ; in which case, they are accustomed to act unfairly, and to conceal the truth by falsehood." See Kennicott's Dissertatio Generalis, 78—87.

" And all the heathen who are called by my name;
" Saith Jehovah who doeth this*."

This reading vindicates at once the quotation of the Apostle James, and presents us with a prophecy which, in his day, had begun to be remarkably fulfilled. The Messiah being come, the Gentiles (or the residue of men after the Jews) were received into his church, and this was not a destroying, but a raising up again of the tabernacle of David. The facts, therefore, declared by Simeon, and by Paul and Barnabas, were not to be regarded with prejudice, as if they were an innovation in the mode of the Divine procedure; but to be acknowledged as the doing of the Lord, whose works are known to him from the beginning of the world, and must all be consistent with his original plan.

The church was now fully instructed, respecting the question, which had been agitated amongst them. James, therefore, proceeds to pronounce the decision, which the case required. " Where-" fore my sentence is," or, " I judge." He speaks with authority as an Apostle, well knowing that he spake the judgment of all his colleagues, who were all inspired by the same Spirit; and whom all the saints present, and all the churches of the saints throughout the world were bound to obey. In this sentence, what Peter called

* See Newcome's Translation of the Minor Prophets.

called " tempting God," James further stigmatizes as " troubling the people of God." The imposition of the Jewish Law upon the Gentile converts would have been troubling them, because it was unnecessary and improper. That Law was now virtually set aside; it was adapted for a local, not a universal religion; it could no longer have any blessing connected with the observance of it; and, instead of leading to the Messiah, as when it was a shadow of good things to come, must have tended to withdraw confidence from him, and have led to superstition and self-righteous pride.

While James thus freed the Gentile converts from circumcision and the Law of Moses, he proposed that a letter should be written to them certifying their freedom, and at the same time, defining its extent, by requiring them " to ab- " stain from pollutions of idols, and *from* forni- " cation, and *from* things strangled, and *from* " blood."

These things, Gentiles had long been accustomed to indulge in, without supposing them to be sinful, and yet they had been forbidden to the servants of the true God from the earliest times. The prohibition of them was universal, and prior to the giving of the Law from Sinai. It was not disannulled, therefore, either by the giving of the Law, or by its vanishing away; and, being, in this passage, solemnly renewed, is to be acknowledged as binding to the end of the world.—

These

These remarks, it may be proper to illustrate, as they apply to each of the articles in the prohibition.

The first is, " pollutions of idols," or, as it is expressed in the letter, " meats offered to idols." Meats were polluted by idolatrous worship, when the whole had been previously offered in sacrifice, and a part afterwards converted into a feast, or when a part was taken from table and put into the fire, with an invocation of the idol. Now as meats are " sanctified by the word of God " and prayer" (1 Tim. iv. 3—5.); so meats are polluted by the name of idols and prayer to them. From the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 8th and 10th, it appears, that the Gentile brethren were not always very willing to admit this truth, but were sometimes inclined to feast with their heathen neighbours, not only in private houses, but even in the temples of idols. It was necessary, therefore, to write unto them to abstain from those pollutions. This prohibition is inculcated and defended by Paul, at great length, in the passages just mentioned of his first epistle to the Corinthians, which afford an excellent illustration of the clause before us, and of the manner in which Christians are bound to observe it in the various cases which are likely to occur. Some have, indeed, thought that Paul departs from the strict letter of this passage, because, in in chap. 8th, he argues merely from the effect of example. But his doctrine, when fully examin-

ed, will be found exactly the same with that of James. It still amounts to a prohibition; for, although he allows all meats to be indifferent in themselves, he expressly condemns the practice of eating meats offered to idols, especially in chap. x. where he shows it to be inconsistent with fellowship at the table of the Lord, with regard for the conscience of other men, and with the duty of a Christian, whether he eats, or drinks, or whatsoever he does, to do all to the glory of God; giving none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God*. —Idolatry had been forbidden before the giving of the Law from Sinai. It was to separate him from idolatry, that God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. And when Jacob was called to go up to Bethel, to dwell there; and make there an altar to God, he said to his household, and to all that were with him, "Put away the "strange gods that are among you†." In like manner, the clause before us requires, that, wherever meats are polluted by idolatrous worship, Christians, when they know the fact, are to testify their abhorrence of idolatry by abstaining from such meats.

The next article in the prohibition is "Fornication." The word in the original frequently signifies any unlawful commerce of the sexes, but

* See MacKnight on these two chapters, and his note 1 on chap. xi. 5.

† Gen xxxv. 1, 2.

but it is limited to the crime expressed in this translation, in Matth. xv. 19. Mark vii. 21. and Gal. v. 19. and seems with propriety to be understood as chiefly intending the limited sense in the clause before us. The heathens never denied the guilt of adultery, but we have abundant evidence, that the most civilized among them could easily excuse fornication†. How much even Gentile converts needed admonition on this subject is manifest from 1 Cor. v. 1. and vi. 13, 18 and 2 Cor. xii. 21. Gal. v. 19. Ephes. v. 3. Col. iii. 5. 1 Thess. iv. 3.—Not only did the seventh commandment forbid all such practice to the Jews, but from the institution of marriage, which, as our Saviour says, (Matth. xix. 8.) was from the beginning, it is evident that the crime was intended to be universally prevented. Hence this is stated to be one end of the institution by Paul in 1 Cor. vii. 2.—Some have been at a loss to account for a prohibition like the one before us, in connexion with precepts about eating blood, and things offered to idols, and have therefore attempted to apply the word used here, to some other thing‡. But the arrangements of Scrip-

 ture

† Thus, Cicero pro M. Cælio, speaking on this subject, says; "Quando enim hoc factum non est? Quando reprehensum? Quando non permissum?"

‡ See a most ridiculous criticism by Michaelis, in his Introduction to the New Testament, vol. 1, p. 189, 190: together with the confutation of it by Marsh, his translator, Note 19.—See also Lardner, vol. 11, p. 333—335.

ture are not regulated by the systematic distinction of moral, and positive precepts. The object, here, seems to have been to enumerate those things, from which it was the will of God, from the beginning, that all his servants should abstain, respecting the sinfulness of which, however, Gentiles needed fresh information. The enumeration, therefore, is perfectly proper, whether the things enumerated happen to be of one description, or not. But the truth is, that fornication has ever had a near relation to the pollutions of idolatrous sacrifice, being, on such occasions, frequently and notoriously practised. Hence, Paul joins the sins of idolatry and fornication together; 1 Cor. x. 7, 8. "Neither be ye "idolaters, as were some of them—neither let us "commit fornication as some of them committed "it." So, 1 Cor. v. 11. "If any man, that is cal- "led a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous (or "a lewd man) or an idolater, with such an one, "no not to eat." Again, Ephes. v. 5. "No "whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covet- "ous man, (or lewd man) who is an idolater, "hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ." So close was the connexion between these two crimes, that Paul, in Col. iii. 5. says, "Covet- "ousness (or lewdness) is idolatry." To the same purpose, see 1 Pet. iv. 3. See also Rev. ii. 14, 20. where, as in the passage before us,

"committing

" committing fornication" is joined with " eating " things sacrificed unto idols*."

The last article of the prohibition relates to " things strangled, and blood." These clauses we join together, because they appear to belong to the same precept, that of abstinence from blood. The first guards against eating blood in the flesh: the second, against eating blood separated from the flesh. Things strangled for the mere purpose of killing them conveniently, and from which the blood is afterwards taken, do not appear from the connexion, to come at all within the meaning of the precept. But things strangled, for the purpose of retaining the blood in them, are certainly forbidden. Such things are said to have been considered as a delicacy†. They are also said

* See Pearce on the place.

† See Grotius on the place. His words are, " Sed cur " πνικτὸν [*suffocatum*] additur? Nimirum quia solebant Græci, " et gentes aliæ, ut ex Athenæo duobus in locis discimus, in " deliciis habere τὰ πνικτὰ [*suffocata*], id est, carnes in quibus " exactâ diligentiâ asservatus erat sanguis, ut ita cum eo san- " guine intus retento, coquerentur, quod et ipsum erat con- " tra legem de sanguine non edendo." " But why are things strangled added? Because the Greeks and other nations, as we learn from two passages of Athenæus‡, considered as a delicacy things strangled, that is, flesh in which the blood was kept with the greatest care, that so it might be dressed with that blood retained within, which also was against the law about not eating blood."

‡ A Greek Grammarian, of whom there is extant a work, containing many curious anecdotes of the ancients, called *Deipnosophistæ*, or the Sophists at supper.

said to have been offered to idols†. The heathens believed that blood was the nourishment of the gods, and that they held peculiar fellowship with them, when in the sacrifices they did eat or drink it. Hence the strangled victims, just mentioned, of which they partook. And hence, when the blood was separated, instead of sprinkling it upon the altar, and pouring out the remainder at the bottom, as was done in the worship of the true God, it was commonly used as a drink-offering. Of this custom the Psalmist speaks with abhorrence, Psal. xvi. 4. "Their "drink-offerings of blood will I not offer." These abominable rites of idolatrous worship probably paved the way for the use of blood as ordinary food, which also seems to be included in the prohibition before us, although it has long been wonderfully common, not only among savage and barbarous, but even among civilized and enlightened nations. There is no doubt, that many individuals, in other respects, of exemplary piety, make no conscience of abstaining from blood; and that many of the ablest modern commentators understand the clause before us, as only of partial and temporary obligation. The subject is certainly not without difficulty. After all the attention we have been able to bestow on it, and with all our prejudices in favour of the lawfulness of the practice, we have found it impossible

† See Beausobre and L'Enfant on the place.

impossible to give to the passage what appears to be its fair and natural explanation, without admitting that it requires the abstinence in question from Gentile believers, in every place, and in every age. When thus understood, it seems to be plain in itself; to harmonize with other parts of Scripture, which treat of the same subject; to be perfectly consistent with those passages which speak of the indifference of meats, and the spirituality of the gospel dispensation; and to be agreeable, not only to the interpretations of the more ancient commentators, but to the well known sentiments and practice of Christians, at large, in primitive times.

A sense, which allows the precept to appear of plain meaning, recommends itself as likely to be the true one. Grant this precept to be universal and permanent, and ye see at once why it should be contrasted with the peculiarities of a local and temporary dispensation; why it should be called a "necessary" thing, or a thing "ne-"cessarily" required; and why it should be expressed, like the other two, without the smallest appearance of limitation. But deny this, and ye must fly, with some, to that rabbinical distinction, unknown in Scripture, of proselytes of righteousness, and proselytes of the gate‡; and say that the apostolic decree was not directed to Gentile

‡ See Lardner, vol. 6, 522—533 and vol. 11, 313—324. —and Doddridge on Acts xvii. 17. Note c.

Gentile converts at large, but merely to some of a certain description, and in particular places*: or, if, with others, ye allow that it was directed to all Gentile converts, ye must labour to show that all the particulars of it are in their own nature indifferent, and on the mere authority of your own hypothesis, conclude that it is therefore not obligatory on all men at all times‡.

Again, The plain meaning of this precept corresponds with other parts of Scripture which treat of the same subject. This correspondence is the more satisfactory, that it shows the similarity between this clause, and the other two, as referring to things which had always been unlawful, but respecting which the Gentiles needed fresh information. It is evident, that what was observed of meats offered to idols, and of fornication, may be observed of the eating of blood. To abstain from it, was not peculiar to the precepts of the Sinai covenant, for Moses expressly declares it to have been excepted, in the grant of animal food to Noah and his posterity, Gen. ix. 1—7. "And God blessed Noah and his sons, "and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, "and replenish the earth. And the fear of you, "and the dread of you, shall be upon every "beast

* See Benson's History of the first planting of the Christian Religion.—MacKnight's Life of Paul, and Preface to the Epistle to the Galatians.

‡ Lardner, vol. 11, 324—328.

" beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the " air, and upon all that moveth upon the earth, " and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your " hand are they delivered. Every moving thing " that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the " green herb have I given you all things. But " flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood " thereof‡, shall ye not eat. And surely your " blood of your lives will I require; at the hand " of every beast will I require it, and at the hand " of man; at the hand of every man's brother will " I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth " man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: " for in the image of God made he man. And " you, be ye fruitful, and multiply, bring forth a- " bundantly in the earth, and multiply therein." —Before this period, animals had been slain in sacrifice†; and it is possible, that, on some of these occasions, a part might be eaten by the offerers as a solemnity of their worship. But the passage, now read, appears to have been the first grant of animals for ordinary food. Hence arose a state of warfare between man and the lower animals. Hence a habit of slaughtering beasts, from which

 the

‡ That the vital principle resides in the blood was held, as a medical opinion, by Dr. Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood; and was lately revived and very ably supported by Mr. J. Hunter, Professor of Anatomy in London.—See Encyclopædia Britannica—*Blood.*

† Gen. iii. 21. & iv. 4. & viii. 20.

the transition might have been short and easy, to the slaughter of men, and even to cannibalism. With this grant, therefore, the Lord, on the one hand, connected the dread of man, in the lower animals, because he would show that he had made them not to resist, but "to be taken and de-"stroyed*." On the other hand, he inculcated that sacred regard to life, in the heart of man, which should lead him to enjoy the grant, without brutal ferocity, and guard him against that appetite for human blood, which forms the most horrid feature of the character of the infuriated savage†. This sacred regard was to be shown by abstinence from the blood even of the lower animals, in obedience to the Creator, who declared the blood to be the life of the animal.—"Flesh

* 2 Pet. ii. 12.

† "Et certè (says Grotius on Acts xv. 20.) præcepti il-"lius, sicut observatio, non nimis superstitiosa, est facilis, ita "causæ honestæ admodum. Nam si quod naturale est spec-"tamus, solent quæ tali alimento utuntur Gentes efferari, "quod in America maximè perspectum est: si vero id quod "morale est, optima et apertissima significatio est, a vindicta "abstinendum. Nam qui se vindicat, *pasci sanguine* dicitur." "And surely the observance of that precept, when free from superstition, as it is easy, so has it a most worthy design. For, if we consider the subject physically, nations which use such food, commonly become fierce, which is very remarkable among the American Indians: if, in a moral point of view, the meaning is most excellent and obvious, that we should refrain from revenge. For he who avenges himself, is said *to feed on blood*."

"Flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood "thereof," is a phrase which modern Jewish commentators have interpreted as signifying merely flesh in its live state, as a limb or piece of flesh, taken warm from a living animal, (the eating of flesh in which state is said to be a practice in Abyssinia, and perhaps in some other barbarous countries), and they suppose the precept is levelled against cruelty‡. This is no doubt, its aim, but it is hardly warrantable to restrict the meaning of it, as the Rabbis have done. In opposition to their opinion, we may remark, that the Septuagint translators, and Josephus §, understood it as expressing in general, the exception of blood, in the grant of animal food, which was confined to the flesh of the animal. To make the grant thus defined the more remarkable, the Lord connects with it the protection of human life, which was not to be violated, on pain of death, to be inflicted, not only by legal sentence, but often also by remarkable providential dispensations, both upon man and upon beast. Thus was the grant of animal, like that of vegetable food, originally given with a limitation,

 which

‡ See Ainsworth and Grotius on the place. The words of the latter are, "Hebræi recentiores, et, ut credo, Christ-"ianorum odio, sentiunt vetari hic esum membri rapti de ani-"mali vivo."—"The more modern Hebrews, and, *as I believe, from hatred of the Christians*, suppose that what is here prohibited is the eating of a limb torn from a living animal."

§ See Antiquities, Book 1, chap. 3, 8.

which some think is referred to in the expression; "even as the green herb have I given you all "things."—When abstinence from blood was injoined under the Law, the reason of the original precept was repeated, while another reason, drawn from the atonement, and peculiar to the Jewish dispensation, was added, Lev. xvii. 11. "For "the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have "given it to you upon the altar, to make an atone-"ment for your souls: for it is the blood that mak-"eth an atonement for the soul." This precept of abstinence was declared to be binding alike on the Jew and the stranger. Nor is the permission, Deut. xiv. 21. to give to a stranger to eat what had died of itself, any relaxation, as some have thought, of the precept in Leviticus, because this case does not in fact come within the meaning of the precept, although some of the primitive Christians thought otherwise, and chose to err on the safe side*. The precept refers to the mode of killing, as well as to the act of eating. Now what has died of itself is beyond the reach of human cruelty, and its blood could not be used in making atonement. To eat of such flesh, therefore, was not a profanation of what was sacred, but merely an uncleanness. Accordingly, the reason why the Jews were to give it away was, that they were "a holy people;" and in Lev. 17. the consequence of transgressing these two

* See page 66.

two precepts was very different, for while, in verse 10th, the eater of blood was to be cut off from his people, in verse 15th, the eater of that which died of itself, or that which was torn of beasts (whether a Jew or a stranger) was only to wash his clothes in water, and be unclean until the even.—From this detail it appears, that the precept respecting blood, having been prior to the giving of the Law on Sinai, remains unaltered by the end of that dispensation; especially since, in the passage before us, it is expressly recognized as binding on Gentile believers, in common with those other precepts, which are intended to mark their abhorrence of idolatry, and of all manner of uncleanness.

Further, This interpretation of the precept is perfectly consistent with those passages which speak of the indifference of meats, and the spirituality of the gospel dispensation. The abolition of the distinction between clean and unclean beasts does not at all affect the question respecting blood, for blood was forbidden, not because it was unclean, but because it was sacred. When our Saviour says, Matt. xv. 11. "Not that which "goeth into the mouth defileth the man," he is not opposing any precept of the Law, for it was still in force, but only a tradition of the elders. He determines nothing about the lawfulness of eating particular kinds of food, but only the unimportance of accidental pollution adhering to our food. His own conclusion is, "to

"eat

" eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." Food, in itself, can in no case defile a man; and therefore, where the Law did not prescribe, there could be no transgression, either in the food or the manner of eating it. But our Saviour had no intention to allow his disciples to eat swine's flesh, which at that time was unclean, neither ought we to apply his words to the eating of blood, which seems to have been always prohibited, and about which there was then no question. Some have thought it antichristian to forbid the eating of blood, because Paul describes men who should depart from the faith, (1 Tim. iv. 3.) as commanding " to abstain from meats," and adds in opposition to them, that " every crea- " ture of God is good, and nothing to be refus- " ed, if it be received with thanksgiving." But he is there evidently speaking, not of every creature universally, for many creatures are not good for food; neither of any of the creatures without respect to the grant of them; but expressly limits his censure to the prohibition of " meats " which God hath created to be received." Such prohibitions are remarkably characteristic of the papal system; and it has been observed of it, that while it contains prohibitions of meats, which God created to be received, it has all along permitted the use of that which, in the passage before us, God has forbidden. The Apostle Paul says, Rom. xiv. 17. " The kingdom of God is not " meat and drink;" that is, as the whole con-

nexion

nexion shows, the Mosaic distinction of meats is abolished in the kingdom of God. But we must not understand him as denying that there are any precepts about eating and drinking, in the kingdom of God, otherwise we should be led to set aside, not only the precept before us, but also the institution of the Lord's Supper.—Several other passages of Scripture might here be considered, in the same way; but we hope, that the remarks already made, and a little attention to the plain and connected meaning of the places in which they occur, will enable the serious inquirer, to perceive their perfect consistency with the interpretation which we have given of the passage before us.

We have acknowledged, that some of the ablest modern commentators understand this passage, as only of partial and temporary obligation. It is of importance to remark, on the other hand, that the most eminent ancient Christian writers appear not only to have been of a different opinion themselves, but to have been supported in it, by the general practice of Christians in their day, and that in circumstances of the most trying nature. The following quotations have often been made, and are certainly worthy of attention*.

Clemens

* See Grotius on the place.—Glas on the Unlawfulness of Eating Blood, vol. 2d of his works.—Pirie's Inquiry into the Lawfulness of Eating Blood.

Clemens Alexandrinus, in his Pedagogue, written about A. D. 193, says, " it is not lawful for " men to touch blood †." And again, on 1 Cor. x. 25. " Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that " eat," he says, " Eat every thing, with the ex- " ception of those things which are specified in " the general epistle of all the Apostles ‡."

Tertullian, in his Apology, written A. D. 200, says, " For shame, therefore, blush when ye " meet a Christian, who will not endure a drop " of the blood of any animal among his victuals, " and therefore, for fear any should be lodged " among the entrails, we abstain from things " strangled, and such as die of themselves. A- " mong other experiments for the discovery of " Christians, this is one, to present them with " blood-puddings, as very well knowing their o- " pinion about the unlawfulness of eating blood, " by which ye wish to make them transgress. " And what a strange thing is it, that ye who " know well that the Christians are so religious- " ly averse to the blood of beasts, should ima- " gine them eager upon the blood of men* !"

Minutius

† Ουδε γαρ θιγειν αιμα τοις ανθρώποις θεμις. Lib. 3. in fine. See Beausobre's Remarques sur les Actes des Apotres, chap. xv. 29.

‡ Καθ' ὑπεξαίρεσιν των δηλωμένων καὶα τὴν Ἐπιστολην τὴν καθολικὴν τῶν Ἀποστόλων ἁπάντων. Strom. lib. iv. See Beausobre's Remarques sur la 1 Epitre aux Corinthiens, chap. x. 25.

* Erubescat error vester Christianis, qui ne animalium quidem

Minutius Felix, in his Octavius, written about A. D. 213, says.—" Not unlike to him (a hea-" then deity) are they who voraciously feed on " wild beasts brought from the amphitheatre, all " besmeared with blood, and fattened with hu-" man flesh. But it is unlawful for us either " to be the spectators of homicide, or to hear " it described; and how strictly we abstain from " human blood, may be learnt from this, that we " never taste the blood of those animals which " are provided for our sustenance*."

Again, in the account of the Martyrs at Lyons, in Gaul, written also in the 2d century, we find the following passage: " And there was a " certain woman named Biblias, of the number " of those who had denied Christ. Satan, con-" fident that she was already devoured of him, " sought to increase her condemnation, by caus-" ing her to blaspheme; and he brought her

 " forth

quidem sanguinem in epulis esculentis habemus: qui propterea quoque suffocatis et morticinis abstinemus, ne quo sanguine contaminemur, vel intra viscera sepulto. Denique inter tentamenta Christianorum, botulos etiam cruore distentos admovetis, certissimi scilicet illicitum esse penes illos, per quod exorbitare eos vultis. Porro quale est, ut quos sanguinem pecoris horrere confiditis, humano inhiare credatis?

* Non dissimiles et qui de arena feras devorant illitas et infectas cruore, vel membris hominis et viscere saginatas. Nobis homicidium nec videre fas, nec audire: tantumque ab humano sanguine cavemus, ut nec edulium pecorum in cibis sanguinem noverimus. § xxx.

" forth to punishment; and he hoped to constrain " her, already feeble and dispirited, to make re- " port, that things ungodly were perpetrated a- " mong us. But she, in the midst of torments, " awakening as out of a profound sleep, recal- " led to her remembrance the everlasting pu- " nishments in hell, and she gainsaid the blas- " phemers, and thus spake: " How can they de- " vour children, to whom it is not lawful even " to taste the blood of brute animals*?"

Many similar passages might be added. It seems very worthy of notice, that no Christian writer, of equal antiquity, appears to have been of a different opinion, or to have given the smallest hint of a different practice among his brethren, from what is above expressed†. The first writer, (so far as I can find) who treats the Apostolic precept as of temporary obligation, is Augustine, a celebrated writer indeed, but who did not flourish till towards the end of the fourth century, when Christianity had become a national religion, and when the multitudes of worldly

* See Lord Hailes's Christian Antiquities, vol. 1st, page 40, and his Note upon the passage.—See also Eusebius's History, Book 5th, chap. 1st.

† To Eleutherius, said to have been made the twelfth bishop of Rome about A. D. 176, is ascribed a Decretal, addressed to the bishops of Gaul, and a decree, declaring against Montanus and his followers, that no food was forbidden to the Christians; but both are deemed spurious.—See Bower's History of the Popes, vol. 1st.

worldly professors had introduced among the disciples of Christ, a relaxation of morals, and even a conformity to many of the abominations of paganism.

Speaking of the opinion of some, that by abstinence from blood, we ought to understand the prohibition of homicide, he says, "To discuss "this at present would be tedious, and is un- "necessary, because, even if the Apostles then "commanded that Christians should abstain "from the blood of animals, and should not eat "things strangled; they seem to me to have "chosen for a time a thing that was easy, and "by no means burdensome to the observers, in "which Gentiles also might observe somewhat "in common with Jews, on account of that cor- "ner-stone which was building the two upon it- "self; at the same time, they were also admo- "nished, at the very ark of Noah, when God "ordered this, that the church would be form- "ed of all nations, the prophecy of which now "began to be fulfilled, in the Gentiles coming "to the faith. But when that time was past, "in which those two walls, the one of the "circumcision, the other of the uncircumci- "sion, coming together, although united in the "corner-stone, were more remarkably distin- "guished by certain peculiarities of their own; "and as soon as such a church was effected, as "in it no carnal Israelite appears, what Christ- "ian is now so observant of this precept, as not

" to touch thrushes or smaller little birds, un-
" less their blood have been poured out, or not to
" eat a hare, if it has been struck with the hand
" on the neck, and not been killed by a bloody
" wound? And the few who perhaps still are
" afraid to touch those things, are laughed at
" by others†," &c.

On this passage we may observe, that Augustine admits the sense in which the more early Christians understood the Apostolic precept; that his

† Hoc nunc discutere longum est, et non necessarium, quia et si hoc tunc Apostoli præceperunt, ut ab animalium sanguine abstinerent Christiani, ne præfocatis carnibus vescerentur; elegisse mihi videntur pro tempore rem facilem, et neutiquam observantibus onerosam, in qua cum Israelitis etiam gentes, propter angularem illum lapidem, duos in se condentem, aliquid communiter observarent; simul et admonerentur in ipsa arca Noæ, quando Deus hoc jussit, ecclesiam omnium gentium fuisse figuratam, cujus facti prophetia jam gentibus ad fidem accedentibus incipiebat impleri. Transacto vero illo tempore, quo illi duo parietes, unus ex circumcisione, alter ex præputio venientes, quamvis in angulari lapide concordarent, tamen suis quibusdam proprietatibus distinctius eminebant; ac ubi ecclesia Gentium talis effecta est ut in ea nullus Israelita carnalis appareat, quis jam hoc Christianus observat, ut turdos vel minutiores aviculas non attingat, nisi quarum sanguis effusus est, aut leporem non edat, si manu a cervice percussus, nullo cruento vulnere occisus est? Et qui forte pauci adhuc tangere ista formidant, a ceteris irridentur, &c. Lib. 32, contra Faustum, cap. 13, tom. 8, operum, p. 324.—I have taken the passage from Buddeus's Ecclesia Apostolica, cap. 4, De Concilio Hierosolymitano, p. 285.

his opinion of it, as a measure of expediency, and of temporary obligation, is mere hypothesis—(" they seem to me," says he;)—that he admits the Apostolic precept to correspond with that which was given to Noah, but makes a very unnatural supposition in representing the precept to Noah as a prophetic intimation; that he seems to congratulate the church on the absence of the Jews, and to take no thought about their expected return; that, in the spirit and style, which many have since adopted, he presumes to ridicule a Divine precept, which had ceased to be popular; that he acknowledges, however, there were still a few who religiously observed it, against whom he has nothing to say, but that they were despised by their brethren. Whether this fact tended most to the disparagement of the despisers or the despised, may deserve consideration‡.

As a reason of the judgment which the Apostle now gave, he adds;

" For Moses of old time hath in every city " them that preach him, being read in the syna- " gogues every Sabbath day."

The Law of Moses was the ground on which the judaizing teachers improperly pleaded for imposing

‡ In addition to the books above mentioned, the reader may see a very able discussion of the question concerning the eating of blood, in Revelation examined with Candour, vol. 2d, Dissertations 1st and 2d.

posing his yoke. It was also the ground on which the Apostle seems to have founded his restrictions; since the original of each of them may be traced, as we have seen, to the writings of the Law. He, therefore, refers to Moses, with a view to intimate, that, while he guarded the liberty of the Gentiles from the obligations of the Sinai covenant, which Moses recorded as laid upon the Jews; he was equally disposed to enforce the authority of Moses, respecting precepts which he recorded as binding upon all mankind.

There is here an emphasis evidently laid on the circumstance that Moses was preached, or publicly read, in every city. By attending to this, we see why James thought it proper, that a message should be sent to the Gentile converts in writing. This was an important part of his sentence. It was not a matter of course in replying to the question, for the question had been proposed verbally. It was not for the information merely of the Brethren at Antioch, for they sent chosen men to them, with Barnabas and Paul, who were to tell the same things by mouth. This writing was intended for circulation through all the cities in which churches had been gathered; and the authentic copies of it, for a permanent document, to be publicly read, and appealed to, and compared with the Law of Moses, which of a long time had been publicly read, in every city, in the Jewish synagogues, every Sabbath day, and would continue to be so, as long as

Jewish

Jewish synagogues, or Christian churches on earth should exist.—Accordingly as Paul and Silas travelled not merely through Syria and Cilicia, which are mentioned along with Antioch in the letter, but to Derbe and Lystra (chap. xvi. 1.) "as they went through the cities, they deli-"vered them the decrees for to keep, that were "ordained of the Apostles and Elders which "were at Jerusalem." The consequence was a happy one. "And so were the churches esta-"blished in the faith, and increased in number "daily," chap. xvi. 4, 5. When this decision is referred to, in chap. xxi. 25. there is a similar emphasis laid on its having been written. "As "touching the Gentiles which believe, we have "written *and* concluded," or, "we wrote hav-"ing concluded." This letter is the more remarkable, that it seems to have been the first writing which was given by inspiration under the New Testament dispensation; and the more effectually to preserve it, Luke was led, along with the history which occasioned it, to insert it at full length in this book of the Acts.

If these remarks be correct, this verse will not be found to warrant us to say, that the restrictions of the Apostolic decree were made merely with the view of reconciling the Jews of that age, to hold communion with the Gentiles. Had this been all that was hinted at in the verse before us, it would have been more in point to

have

have mentioned the temple service which was soon to cease, than that of the synagogues which continues to this day. But it seems wonderful, that those who view these restrictions as intended merely to avoid giving offence, should so constantly conclude from that supposition, that they are only of temporary obligation. If offending the Jews should be the only reason for abstaining from blood, still the abstinence should be observed as long as the offence continues. The Jews abhor the eating of blood as much as ever they did. They are as numerous, and as widely, or rather more widely, dispersed, than in the days of the Apostles. If fewer of them now believe, let us consider, whether neglecting the precept of the Apostles have not added to their hatred of Christianity; and let us beware how we present any stumbling-block to oppose their return to the Lord. For, wherever Jews reside, Moses hath them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

But the question seems not to have been what would avoid offence, but what burden was it necessary for the Apostles of Christ to impose upon the Gentiles. It was in this point of view, that the judaizing teachers represented the observance of the Law of Moses (verse 1st); and while the decision freed the Gentiles from that burden, it laid on them another "burden," consisting, as it is expressed in the letter, of certain

"necessary

" necessary things*," or " things laid upon them " of necessity." When any thing was done merely to avoid offending the Jews, that reason is distinctly mentioned. Thus Paul took Timothy, and " circumcised him, because of the Jews " which were in those quarters," chap. xvi. 3. But, in the present case, the judgment was not offered, as a compromise, but as a decision, upon the question, which the Apostles and Elders had met to consider.

Many, perhaps, would here indignantly reply: What, then, is abstinence from blood necessary to salvation? We believe that the thought of laying so much stress on an article apparently so indifferent, is the great reason why so much ingenuity has been employed to explain away the Apostolic prohibition. It certainly is very proper to be cautious, that we do not inculcate the observance of any thing, which is not plainly injoined upon Christians in the word of God. To do this, would be to fall into an error similar to that of the judaizing teachers of old. It is also of

 importance,

* Guyse and others plead that the necessity here, related not to Christians as such, but merely to the then present state of the church. And Pearce has endeavoured, by the help of a various reading, to prove that this is the proper interpretation of the original expression. But even if that reading should be admitted, (which is by no means necessary) the passages he refers to will be found hardly to support his translation; and, the considerations suggested in the preceding page, seem an insuperable objection to it.

have mentioned the temple service which was soon to cease, than that of the synagogues which continues to this day. But it seems wonderful, that those who view these restrictions as intended merely to avoid giving offence, should so constantly conclude from that supposition, that they are only of temporary obligation. If offending the Jews should be the only reason for abstaining from blood, still the abstinence should be observed as long as the offence continues. The Jews abhor the eating of blood as much as ever they did. They are as numerous, and as widely, or rather more widely, dispersed, than in the days of the Apostles. If fewer of them now believe, let us consider, whether neglecting the precept of the Apostles have not added to their hatred of Christianity; and let us beware how we present any stumbling-block to oppose their return to the Lord. For, wherever Jews reside, Moses hath them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

But the question seems not to have been what would avoid offence, but what burden was it necessary for the Apostles of Christ to impose upon the Gentiles. It was in this point of view, that the judaizing teachers represented the observance of the Law of Moses (verse 1st); and while the decision freed the Gentiles from that burden, it laid on them another "burden," consisting, as it is expressed in the letter, of certain

"necessary

" necessary things*," or " things laid upon them " of necessity." When any thing was done merely to avoid offending the Jews, that reason is distinctly mentioned. Thus Paul took Timothy, and " circumcised him, because of the Jews " which were in those quarters," chap. xvi. 3. But, in the present case, the judgment was not offered, as a compromise, but as a decision, upon the question, which the Apostles and Elders had met to consider.

Many, perhaps, would here indignantly reply: What, then, is abstinence from blood necessary to salvation? We believe that the thought of laying so much stress on an article apparently so indifferent, is the great reason why so much ingenuity has been employed to explain away the Apostolic prohibition. It certainly is very proper to be cautious, that we do not inculcate the observance of any thing, which is not plainly injoined upon Christians in the word of God. To do this, would be to fall into an error similar to that of the judaizing teachers of old. It is also of

 importance,

* Guyse and others plead that the necessity here, related not to Christians as such, but merely to the then present state of the church. And Pearce has endeavoured, by the help of a various reading, to prove that this is the proper interpretation of the original expression. But even if that reading should be admitted, (which is by no means necessary) the passages he refers to will be found hardly to support his translation; and, the considerations suggested in the preceding page, seem an insuperable objection to it.

importance, that, among precepts which are acknowledged, we do not lay a disproportionate stress upon some comparatively of inferior consequence, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the Law. "Ye blind guides," said our Saviour, "who strain out a gnat, and swallow a "camel," Matt. xxiii. 24. But, on the other hand, may there not be danger of shutting our eyes against the most obvious precept, if custom have taught us to disregard it, or if we be ashamed to confess that our religion may descend to the most minute particulars of ordinary habit. Surely whatever is plainly injoined must be considered by a Christian as a necessary duty. When he reads the institution of the Lord's Supper, for example, he must not deny his obligation to observe it, and say, What! is the eating of a little bread, and the drinking of a little wine necessary to salvation? In like manner, when he reads the precept respecting blood, it would be inconsistent to say, that because it requires little it should not be observed. Had some great thing been required, would we not have done it, how much more should we comply, in a matter so easy! If, after all, it should be asked, if we seriously mean to make abstinence from blood a matter of conscience, it is surely not too strong to answer, in the words of the Apostolic decree, "from which if ye keep "yourselves, ye shall do well," verse 29.

Having dwelt so long on the judgment, as stated

ed by James, we shall not particularly discuss the contents of the letter.

The unanimity with which the judgment of the Apostle was adopted, is a proof that the Apostles and Elders, whose decree it was afterwards called, were inspired by the same Spirit; and that the whole church, among whom the gifts of the Spirit were very generally enjoyed, yielded implicit obedience to Apostolic authority. It was upon receiving the word of the Apostles, that men were added to the churches, and upon obeying it, that they were retained in the churches. From the judgment of the Apostles there could be neither dissent, nor appeal. "If any man," says Paul, "think himself to be a prophet, or "spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things "that I write unto you are the commandments "of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, "let him be ignorant," 1 Cor. xiv. 37, 38.

As a testimony to the obedience of the church at Jerusalem, and to make them an example to the churches at Antioch and elsewhere, the Apostles and Elders name the Brethren, along with themselves in the inscription of the letter. The Brethren, therefore, are evidently represented as doing more than acquiescing in the judgment of the Apostles and Elders. They had the honour to join in adopting and transmitting it as their judgment. "It pleased the Apostles, and Elders, "with the whole church, to send chosen men of "their own company—and they wrote letters by

" them after this manner."——Again, in the letter itself—" It seemed good unto us" (viz. Apostles, Elders, and Brethren) " being assem- " bled with one accord, to send chosen men " unto you."——" It seemed good unto the " Holy Ghost, and to us" (Apostles, Elders, and Brethren) " to lay upon you no greater " burden than of necessity these things." Since, then, the church at Jerusalem was allowed to join with the Apostles and Elders, in giving their judgment on a question which was brought before them, how unbecoming must it be for church rulers of a description at best so inferior to the Apostles, to exclude the brethren from such a privilege now! If it be pleaded, that the Brethren at Jerusalem, being generally endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, were better fitted than ordinary Christians now for judging along with the Apostles and Elders; it may be answered, that if the people have not the gifts of the Holy Spirit, neither have their pastors. If this prove any thing, it proves what we shall never deny, that neither the one nor the other, nor both, have now any right to add to the decrees recorded in Scripture. The language, here, is remarkably calculated to contradict the opinion, that the church in this passage, means a representative assembly of office-bearers; for in no part of Scripture is the word church more expressly used for denoting the believing people, in distinction from their office-bearers. Ask those who hold this

this opinion, of whom their church courts consist, they must reply, of bishops, or ministers and elders. Then certainly they are not formed on the model of the council, or synod, or church meeting at Jerusalem, for that consisted of the Apostles, and Elders, with the whole church.

The expression which occurs in the letter, "It "seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us," has been arrogantly adopted by many ecclesiastical councils, in pretended imitation of this decree. Surely the inspiration of those, whose judgment it was, must ever distinguish a style which might be proper for them, from one which might be proper for mere fallible men. Some have pleaded, that these words asserted a Divine direction in their convened council, superior to what any of them pretended to in his individual capacity. Nothing can be more extravagant than such a supposition. The expression in question seems to refer to what the Holy Ghost had miraculously declared, when he fell upon Cornelius and other converted Gentiles, as stated by Peter, and by Barnabas and Paul. But in whatever sense it be viewed, we may boldly affirm, that no council can be warranted in using such language in their decrees, who have not a similar confirmation of their doctrine, by a miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost, designed purposely to confirm their sentence.

With all the authority of Divine influence, this decree proceeds in a strain of modesty and gentleness,

tleness, which forms a most striking contrast to the insolence, and spirit of imprecation, for which pretended imitations of it have long been notorious. "We lay upon you," say the Apostles and Elders, "no greater burden than these necessary "things"——"from which if ye keep your-"selves ye shall do well. Fare ye well." But how speak the usurpers of Apostolic authority? "Whosoever shall wilfully break our decree—"let him be anathema*."

The effects of the Apostolic decree were such as might be expected from its wisdom, as well as from the spirit in which it was written. When it was read to the church at Antioch, "they re-"joiced for the consolation," v. 31. or, for the "exhortation;" the word has both significations. They were comforted by their deliverance from the Mosaic yoke. They were even happy to comply with the exhortation as to what they should renounce. And they rejoiced that the ground of dissension was happily removed, and the

* This gentle manner of concluding, says Doddridge, was worthy the *Apostolical* wisdom and goodness. Too soon did succeeding *councils of inferior authority* change it for the style of *anathemas:* forms which have, I doubt not, proved an occasion of consecrating some of the worst passions of the human mind under sacred names, and which, like some ill-adjusted weapons of war, are most likely to hurt the hand from which they are thrown.

the terms of peace finally settled between Jews and Gentiles in Christ Jesus*.

Brethren, we have an interest in this important decision, as well as the Gentile believers of old. Let us learn gratitude for the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, and for the solemn manner in which that liberty has been secured. Our blessed Saviour hath redeemed us so completely through the shedding of his precious blood, that we need no other ground of hope for salvation. The attempts of men to deprive us of this sure foundation have tended the more fully to display its excellence. We are not only taught to cease from vain contrivances of our own, but are expressly exempted, and that

* On this passage of Scripture the reader will find many excellent observations in Mr. Innes's Reasons for Separating from the Church of Scotland, in a series of letters, chiefly addressed to his Christian friends in that establishment, let. 3d. —The whole book will be found highly interesting by every serious lover of the truth.—Those readers who may wish to see what is said for other views which have been given of this passage of Scripture, may consult the Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 32.—Form of Presbyterial Church vernment;—of Classical Assemblies, and of Synodical Assemblies.—Mr. Muir of Paisley's Sermon, intitled, the Synod of Jerusalem, or Courts of Review in the Christian Church Considered: also Mr. Hall's View of the Gospel Church, chapter 13th. To Mr. Muir's Sermon, an answer was published at Glasgow, intitled The Synod of Jerusalem Considered, or Remarks upon a Sermon preached by the Rev. Mr. Muir, at the opening of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr.

that by the Apostles of the circumcision themselves, from all the observances of a typical dispensation; observances, of Divine institution, indeed, and useful for a time, but which were by no means sufficient to give peace to the conscience, or to inspire with confidence in our approaches to God. In Jesus Christ we find rest to our souls, and liberty of access to the holiest of all. We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. While we observe all things, which our blessed Lord hath commanded, we experience that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty: only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Learn from the grace of God which hath appeared unto all men, bringing salvation, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God. Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

If we value our privileges, let us beware how we part with them. We need not wonder if prejudice,

judice, intolerance, rivalship, and such like evil things, should occasionally disturb the churches now, as they did the churches of old. But blessed be God, the Scriptures give not the smallest shadow of pretext for rearing the fabric of human authority over the conscience. The Christian knows the law by which he delights to be governed, and, if he choose to enjoy his privileges, that law cannot be applied, except in his own presence, and with his own consent. No crafty scheme can be devised in secret for the regulation either of our principles, or our conduct. No unexpected mandate can be issued to take us by surprise†. No man, no assembly of men, has any claim whatever to the obedience of our faith. Here, the word of God is our only standard, and the love of Christ our only tie. By this standard, and in this temper, prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance of evil. Let us walk by the same rule, let

† The memorable Hales of Eaton College was chaplain to our ambassador at the Hague, at the time when the synod of Dort was held, and was sent by the ambassador to attend the consultations of that assembly, and to give him an account of them. His last letter on the subject begins with these remarkable words. "Our synod goes on like a watch; "the main wheels upon which the whole business turns are "least in sight; for all things of moment are acted in pri- "vate sessions; what is done in public is only for shew and "entertainment." See his Works, vol. 3d.

us mind the same thing. Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds.

When disputes arise, let the appeal be made to the Apostles and Prophets. Beware of meeting for strife and debate. Take time to consider, to inquire, and to pray. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls. Be cordial and unanimous in consenting to every Divine decision. Count it equally your honour and your happiness, to renounce what the Scriptures refuse to confirm, however fondly, and however long, ye have been accustomed to cherish it. But be not hastily carried away by novelty. Follow nothing because it may be the current opinion of the day, unless ye see it plainly established in the word of God, and that not merely in the apparent phraseology of particular texts, but in the connected and harmonious language

of

of the whole. See that ye form no opinion without considering whether ye really understand the state of the question. Desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby. Obey from the heart that mould of doctrine into which ye are delivered. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

These rules are useful, not only for directing the Christian, but for trying those who assume the Christian character. If ye are Christians indeed, the love of God, and of the brethren, will overcome every other consideration, and will unite you in the confession and obedience of the truth. But if ye are not Christians, preconceived notions, deep-rooted habits, selfish partialities, unexpected temptations, worldly circumstances and prospects, your interest, your reputation, your influence, your ease, will, one, or other, or all of them, carry you away. Only Christians can be governed by Christian motives.

Let not worldly men glory over the church of Christ, because of the controversies which exercise her faith and patience. If we are lamentably torn by dissensions, ye are hateful and hating one another. Ye contend about trifles and trifles only; and what is your common, your final appeal? Not to the holy Scriptures of truth: not to principles of obvious equity.—Your appeal is to

violence, to fire, and sword. This is the case, not only among the ignorant and barbarous, but also among the highest pretenders to reasoning and refinement, when circumstances present the temptation. Nor is it among yourselves alone that ye contend. Ye strive with your Maker. Ye are not subject to his law, and ye make light of his mercy revealed in the gospel. But who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? Thus saith the Lord, consider your ways. How shall ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation? What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? The disputes among Christians form no excuse for your inattention to the word of God. Were ye better acquainted with them, and willing to judge of them with any thing like candour; ye would see, that Christ has a people upon earth, who know the truth, who are united in the confession of it, and by whom its sanctifying influence is practically displayed. Deceive not yourselves, then, with the notion that the gospel is all uncertainty and fable. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Whosoever believeth in him shall be saved. This is the ministry of reconciliation, that God was by Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. This word of reconciliation he committed to the Apostles. And

they

they by their writings still speak, as ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them: they pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Christians, liable as we are, from remaining ignorance and depravity, to differ in opinion; we need not despair of being finally gathered into one. Already have we learnt to say, "Peace "be with all them that love our Lord Jesus "Christ in sincerity." Let us follow after charity, which rejoiceth in the truth, which never faileth. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known. Well may we rejoice for this consolation.—Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Note on the following sentence which occurs in page 55.

"Things strangled for the mere purpose of "killing them conveniently, and from which the "blood is afterwards taken, do not appear from "the connexion, to come at all within the mean-"ing of the precept."

I made this remark in allusion to the ordinary method of killing poultry, because I knew that some, who believed the Apostolic precept to be of permanent obligation, scruple to make use of poultry as food, from the way in which they imagine it to be killed; and I did not think their scruple well founded, even although the fact were as they suppose. But, on further consideration, I am satisfied, that the remark is wholly unnecessary, because the ordinary way of killing poultry is not strangulation. To strangle is to destroy life by intercepting the breath. For this purpose respiration must be obstructed for some time, otherwise the animal soon revives, or may be revived. It would require not less than a quarter of an hour to kill a fowl in this manner. But the ordinary method of doing it is by the dislocation of the neck, and the consequent injury of the spinal marrow, a sound state of which, both in man, and in the lower animals, is essential to life. In this way, the effect is much more speedily and mercifully produced, than could be done by strangulation, or even by any of the ordinary modes of killing animals. So far is it from being a transgression of the Apostolic precept, to kill by injuring the spinal marrow, that this is said to be the very way, in which the Jews kill their meat.

meat. It is in this way also, that cattle are known to be slaughtered in Iceland, Lapland, Portugal, and some countries of the east, as well as very generally on board of ship. It is allowed to be a method more humane, and expeditious, less troublesome, and more adapted to the purpose of fitting them for the food of man, than the savage one commonly in use. The late president of the Board of Agriculture, Lord Somerville, has recommended this method, and an instrument for practising it.

APPENDIX.

On the independency of the primitive churches, it may gratify the reader to see the following extracts from the very learned work of Mosheim, "De rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum "Magnum," On the affairs of the Christians before Constantine the Great. His ecclesiastical history translated by Maclaine is well known, and there his opinion respecting this subject may also be seen, vol. 1st. Cent. 1st. Part 2d. Chap. 2d. Sect. 14th; but the work, which we now quote, is very scarce, and the sentiments of the author are stated at greater length. It is by no means inconsistent with the rejection of human authority in matters of faith, to inquire how any question has been viewed by men of acknowledged eminence for information and judgment.—The title of the paragraph is, "Omnes ecclesiæ pri-"mæ ætatis independentes." Under this title the author proceeds thus;

"Omnes primæ ætatis ecclesiæ, tametsi fidei et amoris vinculo arcte inter se colligatæ et ad omnia sibi officia mutuo præstanda paratissimæ erant, sui tamen juris erant, seque ipsæ sine alieno

eno auxilio et externa quadam auctoritate gubernabant. Nusquam vel in divinis libris, vel in aliis monumentis scriptum legitur aliquid, ex quo intelligi possit, quasdam ecclesias ex aliarum majorum et nobilium ecclesiarum imperio et nutu pependisse: multa contra passim leguntur, quæ testatissimum faciunt, omnes æquo jure ac prorsus inter se pares et æquales fuisse*. Ne hoc quidem ullo

 vel

* Hierosolymitanæ quidem ecclesiæ per tempus aliquod magna fuit dignitas et auctoritas, quod ex *Actis Apostolorum* patet. Antiocheni controversiam suam de legis Mosaicæ præstantia ecclesiæ hujus judicio subjiciebant, *Actor.* xv. Idem alias fecisse ecclesias, verisimillimum est. PAULUS divinitus licet ad obeundum Apostoli munus vocatus, id tamen in primis agebat, ut se, suamque disciplinam Apostolis et cœtui Hierosolymitano probaret et commendaret, Gal. i. 18. ii. 7, 8, 9. Verum hujus auctoritatis radix non tam in ecclesia erat Hierosolymitana, quæ numquam supra reliquas eminere voluit, quam in Apostolis Jesu Christi, qui Hierosolymitano cœtui præsidebant, judicesque a Christo rerum ad religionem pertinentium constituti erant. Apostolos proprie consulebant reliquæ ecclesiæ, non Hierosolymitanum cœtum. Quamquam, ut verum fatear, et ipse hic cœtus, absentibus etiam Apostolis, magis, quam reliquæ Christianorum familiæ, rebus in dubiis in consilium vocari poterat. Multo enim plures, quam in ceteris ecclesiis, homines erant Hierosolymis lumine divino, aliisque donis cœlestibus instructi, quoniam non in Apostolos tantum, verum in universum, qui tum Christum ibi profitebatur, populum Spiritus S. mirabiliter delapsus erat. *Act.* ii. 1. *s.* Non dubito, Ephesinæ ecclesiæ, dum S. JOHANNES in illa vixit, parem inter Asiaticas auctoritatem fuisse; immo cunctis ecclesiis, quibus aliquamdiu Apostolorum aliquis præfuit, hunc habitum esse honorem opinor, ut vicinæ ab illis ecclesiæ docendi, agendi-

que

vel divino, vel humano testimonio non dicam demonstrare, sed probabile tantum reddere licet, plures hoc primo sæculo ecclesias talem inter se societatem coivisse, quales deinde inter omnium fere provinciarum ecclesias extiterunt, ut nimirum certis

que exemplum interdum peterent. Hoc etiam plus, nec enim præter rem difficilis ero, largiar, si quis velit. Concedam nimirum, omnibus ecclesiis Apostolicis, id est, illis, quas ipsi Apostoli construxerant et erudiverant, hoc per tempus aliquod datum fuisse, ut novis forte de religione sententiis propositis et disputationibus commotis, consulerentur. Ejus moris plura ex secundi sæculi scriptoribus testimonia colligi possunt. Existimabant enim ætatis illius doctores, neque prorsus temere, ut tum erant tempora, quemadmodum de rebus ad religionem pertinentibus sentiendum et loquendum esset, id nullis cognitum magis esse debere, quam illis, qui ab ipsis JESU CHRISTI legatis disciplinam acceperant. Præterea quum qui nova dogmata inter populos seminabant, Apostolorum sese auctoritate tuerentur, necessarium videbatur, etiam testimoniis ecclesiarum, quas Apostoli condiderant, audaciam eorum reprimere. Legi omnium instar TERTULLIANUS potest *de præscriptionibus adversus hæreticos*. Ex hoc vero qui ecclesiarum veterum inæqualitatem et potestatem Apostolicarum judicialem probari posse confidunt, maximopere falluntur. Ut enim prætermittam, non ecclesiis, sed ecclesiarum conditoribus, Apostolis, quorum vox et disciplina vivere adhuc in cœtibus, quorum fundamenta jecerant, putabatur, illam judicandi potestatem tributam fuisse; neque moneam, crescente conciliorum auctoritate ac potestate paullatim veterem consuetudinem ecclesias Apostolicas testandi cecidisse: hæc tota res æque libera erat, atque hodie hoc est, utrum aliquis dubia, quibus angitur, collegio Theologorum in Academia quadam enodanda dare velit, necne? Numquam certe ostendetur, lege quadam sancitum fuisse, ut ad

Apostolicas

tis temporibus per episcopos suos convenire, communesque leges ferre, et quæ forte natæ erant, de re divina quæstiones et controversias dirimerent‡. Sæculo demum secundo alias clariora,

 alias

Apostolicas ecclesias deferrentur quæstiones explicatu difficiles: numquam demonstrabitur, judicia harum ecclesiarum oraculorum loco habita esse, impiumque existimatum, qui ab illis sibi recedendum duceret. Fuerit igitur magna primis temporibus ecclesiarum, in quibus Apostoli diu versati erant, reverentia: hoc tamen certissimum manebit, nullum illis fuisse imperium, nullam reliquas ex suo sensu gubernandi potestatem.

‡ Cum multa sunt in S. PAULI epistolis, quæ primas ecclesias nulla re alia, nisi fide et amore, colligatas fuisse, suisque singulas legibus et institutis vixisse, demonstrant: tum septem illæ ad ecclesias Asiaticas exaratæ epistolæ, a quibus S. JOHANNES *Apocalypsin* exorditur, clarissima continent testimonia hujus rei. Nihil primum in his epistolis legitur, unde vel conjectura duci queat, consociatione quadam hos septem cœtus devinctos fuisse, atque conventus inter se seu concilia celebrasse: Id contra, quod servator quemlibet eorum seorsum alloquitur, laudat, reprehendit, monet, non simul omnes, argumento nobis esse debet, nihil eos commune habuisse, præter religionem, quam profitebantur. Si aut certis temporibus, aut re quadam nova et insolita exoriente, antistites harum ecclesiarum convenissent, et in commune consuluissent, quod sæculo secundo usitatum erat, intactum hoc CHRISTUS non dimisisset institutum, sed prudentiam et concordiam conscriptis patribus illis commendasset, vitia item et virtutes ecclesiarum in eos potissimum contulisset. His aliud, majus etiam et luculentius, accedit. Dispar, valdeque diversus erat septem, de quibus agimus, ecclesiarum status. In Ephesina, verbi caussa, Nicolaitis, qualescumque demum fuerint, nullus dabatur locus: *Apoc.* ii. 6. Eadem

alias obscuriora consociationis ejusmodi, quæ concilia peperit, vestigia apparent: ex quo manifestum videtur esse, post Apostolorum tempora eam inventam, et quæ de conciliis primi sæculi, divinoque conciliorum jure feruntur, nulla re alia, quam posteriorum temporum consuetudine et opinione, id est, incertissimis fulcris niti†.

dem vero secta in Pergamena tolerabatur, *Apoc.* ii. 15. Thyatirenses vivere inter suos patiebantur homines, qui cum Deorum cultoribus in templis convivabantur et meretrices sectabantur: quam plerique alii perfidiam abominabantur. Hæc quomodo morum et sententiarum diversitas in his familiis unam provinciam incolentibus existere potuisset, si capita earum consulendi et quid saluti ecclesiarum communi consentaneum esset, deliberandi caussa se nonnumquam congregassent? Si concilia tum temporis habita fuissent, sine ulla controversia caussa Nicolaitarum in disceptationem in illis vocata, et hoc genus communi lege vel probatum, vel ex omnibus ecclesiis ejectum fuisset.

† Vulgo conventus ille cœtus Hierosolymitani, cujus historia *Actor.* xv. legitur, *primum* Christianorum vocatur *concilium*. Patiar ego facile, si qui pergere velint ita loqui: Sed monendi tamen sunt, alienum prorsus hoc esse a vera potestate vocabuli *concilium*. Hierosolymitana illa congregatio unius ecclesiæ concio erat, ex Apostolis, senioribus, et populo composita. Quales conventus si fas est *concilia* nominare, nulla Christianorum ætas conciliorum fertilior fuit, quam hæc prima, in qua rara tamen fuisse concilia, nemo unus infitiatur. Omnes enim ecclesiæ Christianæ sæpissime hoc ævo eodem modo, quo Hierosolymitanus, coibant, ut de rebus ad religionem, divinumque cultum pertinentibus deliberarent. Et plura idcirco primo sæculo Christiano concilia coacta fuissent, quam omnibus sequentibus ad nostram ætatem sæculis. *Concilium* proprie conventus est plurium ecclesiarum consociatarum,

ciatarum, seu congregatio legatorum multarum familiarum Christianarum fœdere quodam junctarum, in qua de communi omnium salute consultatur, idque sancitur, quod aut omnibus, aut majori saltem delectorum parti melius et utilius videtur. Ejusmodi conventuum exemplum nemo, quidquid etiam conetur, in antiquissimorum Christianorum historia invenerit. Firmatis vero et amplificatis Christianorum rebus, quum formam reipublicæ cujusdam in plures minores civitates divisæ adsciscerent ecclesiæ in una provincia collocatæ, necesse erat, ut ad societatem roborandam et tranquillitatem conservandam ecclesiarum legati nonnumquam convenirent. Sæculum primum § 48.

The next extract contains some additional observations on the history recorded in the xvth. of the Acts.

Dicimus vulgo conventum, in quo lis hæc (de necessitate legis Mosaicæ) composita fuit, primum esse conciliorum a Christianis celebratorum, et ab hoc concilia reliqua omnia fluxisse posteriorum temporum: longius etiam progrediuntur plures, divinumque conciliorum jus ex hoc conventu demonstrandum sibi sumunt: Apostolos enim ecclesia Hierosolymitana congreganda posteros docere voluisse dicunt, controversias de religione conciliorum cognitioni et judicio subjiciendas esse. Sed fateamur, quod res est! Didicimus nos ita loqui et sentire a Romani Pontificis amicis, qui quum nihil in sacris libris inveniant ad divinam conciliorum auctoritatem stabiliendam, ad hunc conventum Hierosolymis ab Apostolis coactum, tamquam ad sacram quamdam anchoram, dudum confugiunt. Non impedio, si quis hunc conventum *concilium* appellare velit: omnis enim conventus legitimus concilium olim dicebatur: Et multis licet exemplis ostendere, etiam doctorum unius ecclesiæ conventum hoc nomine sæpe vocatum fuisse. Vid. JACOBUS GODOFREDUS *ad Codicem*

dicem Theodosianum Tom. 6. *p.* 28. *ed. Ritterianæ.* Sed a comitiis illis, quæ a secundo sæculo celebrata sunt, et proprie *concilia* nuncupantur, procerum ecclesiæ, Hierosolymitanus conventus noster toto genere distat: Et nihil idcirco agunt, qui *conciliorum* originem ab eo repetunt. Sentiebat hoc inter ipsos Romanos, ut acutus erat et ingenii potens, PAULUS SARPIUS in *Historia concilii Tridentini* Lib. 2. p. 240. *Gall. vers. Courayerianæ:* verum reperisse tamen sibi videbatur aliquid, cujus ope conventui huic veri *concilii* nomen vindicari posset. Ideo nempe arbitratur, eum principis concilii vocabulo dignum esse, quia non Apostoli, presbyteri et fratres Hierosolymitani soli, verum etiam legati Antiocheni, PAULUS et BARNABAS, in eo loquuti sunt. Quo quid fieri possit infirmius, ego profecto non video. Ferri posset quodammodo hæc ratio, si constaret, legatos Antiochenos non secus ac Hierosolymitanos Presbyteros, in his comitiis suffragia tulisse, atque inter judices sedisse. Verum evidens est, eos legatorum tantum personam sustinuisse, judiciumque Apostolis et reliquis Hierosolymitani cœtus membris permisisse; Loquebantur illi quidem; et necesse erat, ut loquerentur; verum sententiam suam de proposita questione haud promebant. Adde his, non in hoc conventu ex suffragiorum numero, quod fit in conciliis, litem æstimatam, verum unice ex Apostolorum sensu compositam fuisse. Si numerata fuissent suffragia, deterior forte sententia vicisset: plerique enim Hierosolymitanorum Christianorum legi Mosaicæ immodice favebant, atque acriter pro auctoritate ejus in hoc ipso conventu disputabant. Verum PETRI et JACOBI orationes fluctus hos sedabant, sentiendique ac decernendi modum præscribebant: quibus quidem resistere, nefas multitudini videbatur. Nihil igitur hic concilii simile: immo quæ ferebatur sententia, ne ecclesiæ quidem Hierosolymitanæ decretum erat, verum Apostolorum, qui ad suam mentem ecclesiam dubitantem et disputantem accedere cogebant. Quæ cogitans ex toto probare nequeo B. JUST. HENN. BOEHMERI sententiam in *Diss. juris eccles. antiqui Diss.* 3. § 71. *p.* 218. et alias propositam, qui judicium

cium hujus conventus pro *laudo*, ut Jureconsulti loquuntur, habet, censetque, *Antiochenos per modum compromissi caussam controversam decisioni Apostolorum et matricis ecclesiæ submisisse.* Forte auctor hujus opinionis PAULUS ipse SARPIUS fuit, a quo, timide licet, et breviter *Historiæ concilii Trid. Lib. 2. p.* 240. exhibetur. Ego vero in ea primum hoc desidero, quod assumit, Antiochenos non Apostolis tantum, verum etiam ecclesiæ universæ Hierosolymitanæ, litem suam dirimendam tradidisse. Clarissime enim LUCAS testatur *Actor.* xv. 2. eos solos Apostolos cum presbyteris, quos homines noverant ex illis esse, qui una cum Apostolis divinitus illuminati erant, judices adscivisse, non vero populum simul Christianum Hierosolymis degentem. Apostoli quidem et presbyteri populum in concionem vocabant, quum de quæstione, quæ Antiochenos distrahebat, statuere vellent: Sed hoc illi non necessitati dabant, verum unice prudentiæ: Potuissent enim, si voluissent, pro facultate, quam a Deo acceperant, absente ac inconsulta multitudine, quæ dubia videbantur Antiochenis dissolvere: cujus facultatis luculentum specimen edunt, quum plebem in partes euntem comprimunt, et quemadmodum sentiendum sit, edicunt. Deinde minus hoc ferendum judico, quod Apostoli, si hanc sequi placeat sententiam, pro honorariis tantum in hac caussa arbitris duci debent. Erant illi divinitus creati judices ejusmodi controversiarum de religione: neque liberum idcirco Antiochenis erat, utrum ad eos litem suam deferre vellent, necne? Verum jus ipsum divinum jubebat eos ad Apostolorum tribunal accedere. * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

TRANSLATION.

All the Churches of the first Century Independent.

ALL the churches of the first century, although closely connected by the bond of faith and love, and most ready mutually to perform every duty to one another, possessed nevertheless the right of jurisdiction, and governed themselves without foreign assistance, or any external authority. No where, either in the Scriptures, or in other records, is any thing to be found, from which it can be understood, that some churches depended on the command and will of other churches, which were greater and more renowned: on the contrary, many things every where occur, which make it most evident, that they all had the same authority, and were entirely similar and equal to one another*. By no proof, Divine or human, can

* The dignity and authority of the church at Jerusalem, indeed, was, for some time, great, as is plain from the *Acts of the Apostles*. The brethren of Antioch submitted their controversy about the obligation of the Mosaic Law to the judgment of this church, *Acts* xv. That other churches acted in the same way is highly probable. PAUL, though called of God to discharge the office of Apostle, was nevertheless especially careful, to approve and commend himself and his doctrine to the Apostles and church at Jerusalem, Gal. i. 18. ii. 7, 8, 9. But the foundation of this authority was not so much in the church of Jerusalem, which never

can it be, I say not demonstrated, but so much as rendered probable, that, in this first age, many churches entered into such an association with

N one

never desired pre-eminence above the rest, as in the Apostles of Jesus Christ, who presided over the church of Jerusalem, and were by Jesus Christ appointed judges of things of a religious nature. It was the Apostles properly, not the church of Jerusalem, whom the other churches consulted. Although, to confess the truth, that church itself, even when the Apostles were absent, might, in doubtful cases, have been consulted, in preference to other Christian societies. For at Jerusalem many more, than in the other churches, were endowed with Divine illumination, and other heavenly gifts; since the Holy Spirit fell miraculously not only on the Apostles, but on all the people, who then professed the faith of Christ in that city, *Acts* ii. 1, &c. I have no doubt that equal authority belonged to the church of Ephesus among the Asiatic churches, while St. John lived in it; nay, I suppose that all churches over which any of the Apostles presided for a time, obtained this honour, that from them neighbouring churches sometimes took example both in teaching and acting. I will even go further, if any one choose, for I would not be captious: I will grant then, that to all Apostolic churches, that is, such as the Apostles themselves had reared and instructed, this was for some time given, that, when new opinions concerning religion happened to be started, and disputes raised, they were consulted. Of this custom, many proofs may be collected from the writers of the second century. For the teachers of that age, were of opinion, and not wholly without reason, as times then were, that none should know better how to think and speak of religious subjects, than those who had received instruction from the very ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Besides, since those who disseminated new opinions among the people, defended themselves by the authority of the Apostles,

it

TRANSLATION.

All the Churches of the first Century Independent.

ALL the churches of the first century, although closely connected by the bond of faith and love, and most ready mutually to perform every duty to one another, possessed nevertheless the right of jurisdiction, and governed themselves without foreign assistance, or any external authority. No where, either in the Scriptures, or in other records, is any thing to be found, from which it can be understood, that some churches depended on the command and will of other churches, which were greater and more renowned: on the contrary, many things every where occur, which make it most evident, that they all had the same authority, and were entirely similar and equal to one another*. By no proof, Divine or human, can

* The dignity and authority of the church at Jerusalem, indeed, was, for some time, great, as is plain from the *Acts of the Apostles*. The brethren of Antioch submitted their controversy about the obligation of the Mosaic Law to the judgment of this church, *Acts* xv. That other churches acted in the same way is highly probable. PAUL, though called of God to discharge the office of Apostle, was nevertheless especially careful, to approve and commend himself and his doctrine to the Apostles and church at Jerusalem, Gal. i. 18. ii. 7, 8, 9. But the foundation of this authority was not so much in the church of Jerusalem, which never

can it be, I say not demonstrated, but so much as rendered probable, that, in this first age, many churches entered into such an association with

 one

never desired pre-eminence above the rest, as in the Apostles of Jesus Christ, who presided over the church of Jerusalem, and were by Jesus Christ appointed judges of things of a religious nature. It was the Apostles properly, not the church of Jerusalem, whom the other churches consulted. Although, to confess the truth, that church itself, even when the Apostles were absent, might, in doubtful cases, have been consulted, in preference to other Christian societies. For at Jerusalem many more, than in the other churches, were endowed with Divine illumination, and other heavenly gifts; since the Holy Spirit fell miraculously not only on the Apostles, but on all the people, who then professed the faith of Christ in that city, *Acts* ii. 1, &c. I have no doubt that equal authority belonged to the church of Ephesus among the Asiatic churches, while St. John lived in it; nay, I suppose that all churches over which any of the Apostles presided for a time, obtained this honour, that from them neighbouring churches sometimes took example both in teaching and acting. I will even go further, if any one choose, for I would not be captious: I will grant then, that to all Apostolic churches, that is, such as the Apostles themselves had reared and instructed, this was for some time given, that, when new opinions concerning religion happened to be started, and disputes raised, they were consulted. Of this custom, many proofs may be collected from the writers of the second century. For the teachers of that age, were of opinion, and not wholly without reason, as times then were, that none should know better how to think and speak of religious subjects, than those who had received instruction from the very ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Besides, since those who disseminated new opinions among the people, defended themselves by the authority of the Apostles,

one another, as was afterwards formed among the churches of almost every province, that they should meet, by their bishops, at fixed seasons, and make common laws, and settle whatever questions and controversies of a religious nature might happen to arise‡. At length, in the 2d century

it seemed necessary to check their boldness, by the testimonies also of churches which Apostles had founded. On this subject it will be sufficient to read TERTULLIAN's Prescriptions against Heretics. Those, however, who from this fact presume, that the inequality of the ancient churches, and the judicial power of the Apostolic ones may be proved, are very much deceived. For, not to mention, that the judicial power was ascribed, not to the churches, but to their founders the Apostles, whose voice and discipline was thought still to live in assemblies, which they had formed; nor to remark, that as the authority and power of councils increased, the old custom of appealing to Apostolic churches was laid aside: this whole affair was equally voluntary, as it is now-a-days, whether or not a man shall present for solution, doubts with which he is distressed, to a college of divines in some university. Never surely will it be shown, that any law was made, for referring difficult questions to Apostolic churches: never will it be proved, that the decisions of those churches were regarded as oracles, and that he who might think proper to depart from them was esteemed impious. The churches, therefore, in which Apostles had long continued, enjoyed, in early times, great respect: yet this will remain most certain, that they had no command, no power of governing the rest as they thought proper.

‡ As there are many things in the Epistles of St. Paul which demonstrate, that the first churches were bound together by nothing else, than faith and love, and that each lived

century, vestiges, some clearer, some more obscure, may be traced of that kind of association which produced councils; from which it seems

 to

ed according to its own laws and institutions: So those seven epistles, written to the Asiatic churches, with which St. JOHN begins the Book of the Revelation, contain very clear proofs of the same thing. In the first place, nothing occurs in those epistles, whence it can be so much as conjectured, that those seven churches were connected by any association, and that they held among themselves assemblies or councils; on the contrary, since our Saviour addresses, commends, reproves, admonishes, each of them separately, and not all of them together, we must thence infer, that they had nothing in common, except the religion which they professed. If, either at fixed seasons, or, on the rise of any thing new and uncommon, the bishops of those churches had convened, and held a council for the common benefit, as was customary in the second century, CHRIST would not have passed over such an institution in silence, but would have recommended prudence and concord to those senators, and would have attributed both the vices and virtues of the churches chiefly to them. To these remarks, another both stronger and more evident may be added. The state of the seven churches in question was unequal and widely different. In the Ephesian church, for instance, the Nicolaitans (whatever they were) had no place, Rev. ii. 6. But the same sect was tolerated at Pergamos, Rev. ii. 15. The Christians of Thyatira suffered men to continue amongst them, who feasted with idolaters in the temples, and followed harlots; which treachery most of the others abhorred. How could this diversity of manners and opinions have existed in those societies which were residing in one province, if their leaders had occasionally met together to consult and deliberate for the common welfare of the churches? If councils had been held

at

to be manifest, that it was invented after the times of the Apostles, and that what is said about councils of the 1st century, and the Divine right of councils, rests merely on the custom and opinion of later times, that is, on the most uncertain foundations†.

at that period, unquestionably, the cause of the Nicolaitans would have been brought before them for discussion, and this description of people would have been either approved of by a general law, or cast out of all the churches.

† That meeting of the church of Jerusalem, of which we have the history in the xvth. of the Acts, is commonly called *the first* Christian *Council*. I have no great objection, if any choose to continue so to speak: but let them be admonished, however, that this is altogether foreign from the proper meaning of the word *Council*. That Jerusalem assembly was a meeting of one church, consisting of the Apostles, Elders, and People. If it be proper to call such assemblies *Councils*, no age of Christianity was more fertile of councils, than this first one, in which, however, nobody can deny, that councils were rare. For all the Christian churches in this age very often came together, in the same manner as the one at Jerusalem did, to deliberate on matters which concerned religion and Divine worship. And, therefore, more councils must have been called together in the first age of Christianity, than in all the ages which have followed to our own time. A *Council* properly, is a convention of many associated churches, or a meeting of the ambassadors of several Christian congregations joined by some covenant, in which they consult for the common welfare of all, and that is ordained, which seems best and most useful, either to the whole, or at least to the majority of the representatives. No one, let him try as he will, shall find an instance of such kind of meetings, in the history of the most

ancient

ancient Christians. But after the affairs of the Christians were established and increased, when the churches situated in one province, assumed the form of a commonwealth, divided into many smaller states, it was necessary for strengthening the alliance and preserving tranquillity, that ambassadors of the churches should sometimes convene.

TRANSLATION.

We commonly say that the assembly, in which this dispute (about the necessity of the Mosaic law) was settled, was the first of the councils held by Christians, and that from this proceeded all the other councils of after times: many go even further, and presume that the Divine right of councils may be demonstrated from this assembly: for they say, that the Apostles, by assembling the church of Jerusalem, intended to teach posterity, that controversies respecting religion, should be submitted to the cognisance and judgment of councils. But let us confess, (for the fact is so) that we have learned so to speak and think from the friends of the Roman Pontif, who, since they can find nothing in the sacred books to establish the Divine authority of councils, are accustomed, as their last refuge, to betake themselves to this assembly, called by the Apostles at Jerusalem. I shall not hinder any one who chooses to call this assembly a *Council*: for every lawful assembly was once called a council: and it might be shown by many examples, that an assembly of the teachers, even of one church, was often called by this name. See JAMES GOTHOFRED *on the Theodosian Code, vol.* 6. *p.* 28. *of the Ritterian Edition*. But from those convocations of church rulers, which from the second century were held, and are properly denominated *Councils*, our Jerusalem assembly is totally different: and therefore, it is mere trifling to deduce from it the origin of *Councils*. This was the opinion, even among the Roman Catholics, of PAUL SARPI, an acute and ingenious man, in his

his *History of the Council of Trent, Book 2. page 240, of the French translation of Courayer:* nevertheless, he thought he had discovered something, by the help of which, the name of a true *Council* might be claimed for this assembly. His notion is, that it deserves the title of the first Council, because, not only the Apostles, Elders, and Brethren of Jerusalem, but also ambassadors from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas, spoke in it. A weaker argument I cannot conceive. It might in some measure be admitted, if there were evidence, that the ambassadors from Antioch, as well as the Elders of Jerusalem voted in this assembly, and sat among the judges. But it is evident, that they sustained the character of ambassadors only, and left the decision to the Apostles, and other members of the Jerusalem assembly. They spoke indeed, and it was necessary they should speak; but they did not give their own opinion on the question that was proposed. Besides, the controversy was not judged of in this assembly according to the number of votes, as is done in councils, but was settled solely according to the sentence of the Apostles. Had votes been numbered, the worse opinion might have prevailed: for many of the Christians of Jerusalem immoderately favoured the Mosaic Law, and keenly disputed for its authority in this very assembly. But the speeches of PETER and JAMES calmed the waves, and prescribed the manner of thinking and deciding: to resist them, indeed, seemed to the multitude, impious. Here, therefore, there is nothing like a council: nay, the sentence which was passed, was not the decree of the church of Jerusalem, but of the Apostles, who constrained the doubting and disputing church to accede to their judgment. Considering these things, I cannot wholly approve the opinion of B. JUST. HEN. BOEHMER *in his Dissertations on Ancient Ecclesiastical Law, Diss. 3. § 71. page* 218. and elsewhere proposed, who looks upon the judgment of this assembly as an *arbitration*, as the lawyers speak, and thinks, that it was by way of compromise, that the brethren of Antioch submitted the controverted cause to the decision of the Apostles and mother church. Perhaps the

author

author of this opinion was PAUL SARPI himself, by whom, although with caution and brevity, it is mentioned in the 2d Book of his History of the Council of Trent, page 240. But in this opinion I, in the first place, desiderate what he assumes, that the brethren of Antioch submitted their dispute, not to the Apostles only, but also to the whole church of Jerusalem. For LUKE most clearly testifies, *Acts* xv. 2. that they applied to the Apostles alone as judges together with the Elders, men whom they knew to be of those, who had been divinely illuminated along with the Apostles, and not to the whole Christian people living at Jerusalem. The Apostles and Elders, indeed, called the people together, when they intended to determine the question which had disturbed the Christians of Antioch: but they did this not from necessity, but solely from prudence: for had they chosen, they might, by that power which they had received from God, have solved the doubts of those of Antioch, without the presence or advice of the multitude: of which power they give a remarkable specimen, when they restrain the people who were going into parties, and declare how they should think of the matter. In the next place, I do not think it admissible, that the Apostles, if you choose to follow this opinion, should be held as mere honorary arbiters in this cause. They were divinely appointed judges of such kind of controversies: neither were the brethren of Antioch at liberty to choose whether they would refer their dispute to them or not: but Divine authority itself commanded them to go to the tribunal of the Apostles. * * * * *

* * * * * * * * * *

FINIS.

W. LANG, Printer, 62, Bell-Street.

BS 3629 .C8E9	Ewing, G. Acts of the Apostles 838800
MAR 3 1965	M. A. Breakwell 1507 W. Sorrey Ave 60640

BS
3629
.C8E9

838800

Ewing, G
Acts of the Apostles

MAR 3

M.L. BREAKENRIDGE